

Saverio Mercadante

ZAIRA



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Book cover: Ah! Jealous Amongst the Jealous! (oil on canvas)
by Theodore Jacques Ralli (1852–1909)
Private Collection/Bridgeman Art Library. Christie's Images

Booklet cover: Sarah Bernhardt as Voltaire's Zaire

CD Face: Giuseppina Ronzi di Begnis

Opposite: Saverio Mercadante in 1829

SAVERIO MERCADANTE
ZAIRA

Melodramma tragico in two acts
Libretto by Felice Romani

Orosmane, <i>Sultan of Jerusalem</i>	Alastair Miles
Zaira, <i>a slave of Orosmane</i>	Majella Cullagh
Nerestano, <i>a French knight</i>	Bruce Ford
Lusignano, <i>a prince of the blood of the Kings of Jerusalem</i>	Garry Magee
Corsamino, <i>confidant of Orosmane</i>	Colin Lee
Fatima, <i>confidant of Zaira</i>	Claire Wilde

Geoffrey Mitchell Choir
Mohammedan nobles and soldiers, Slaves, Populace,
Christian slaves, French squires, Mohammedan guards

Philharmonia Orchestra
Christopher Warren– Green, leader

David Parry, conductor

Producer and Artistic Director: Patric Schmid

Managing Director: Stephen Revell

Assistant producer: Oliver Davis

Assistant conductor: Stuart Stratford

Répétiteur: Nicholas Bosworth

Italian coach: Maria Cleva

Music Librarian: Jacqui Compton

Assistant to the Artistic Director: Marco Impallomeni

Article and libretto: Jeremy Commons

Recording Engineer: Chris Braclik

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GIUSEPPINA
RONZI DE BEGNIS

MERCADANTE'S
FIRST
ZAIRA

‘All his knowledge and study of his art’:
Mercadante’s *Zaira*.

IN THE eighteenth century, when Italian opera dominated Europe, Italian composers would travel the length and breadth of the continent from Lisbon to St. Petersburg, finding employment and producing their works at the courts of kings and princes. In the early nineteenth century, even if the supremacy of Italian opera was already being challenged by the rise of nationalistic schools of opera, the tradition still persisted, so it should not surprise us to find a thirty-year-old Mercadante leaving Italy late in 1826 to try his fortunes in Spain and Portugal. He pursued his career in the Iberian peninsular for about four years and, although the details of his life at this time are in need of research and verification, would seem to have composed some seven operas there before returning to Italy early in 1831.

He immediately found himself in demand to resume his career and forge ahead with the composition of new operas. Indeed in 1830, even before he left Spain, he had been commissioned by Domenico Barbaja, the most renowned of all the impresarios of the age, to compose a new work for Naples. The result was the opera we feature here, *Zaira*.

Zaira was first seen at the Teatro S. Carlo, some six or seven months after his return to Italy, on 31 August 1831. In the presence of the aristocracy of Naples and one of the princes of the royal family, it was interpreted by Giuseppina Ronzi De Begnis (*Zaira*), Antonio Tamburini (*Orosmane*), Lorenzo Bonfigli

(Nerestano) and Giuseppe Fioravanti (Lusignano). And it was, so we are told by Francesco Florimo, the great chronicler of Neapolitan musical history, ‘for the most part well received’.

This success was all the more noteworthy since the choice of libretto and, more generally, of subject, must have caused at least some initial doubts.

The libretto was not new. The work of Felice Romani, it had been written for Bellini. But the opera they had produced together, under this same title of *Zaira*, had met with a disconcerting and much–publicised *échec* when mounted to open the new Teatro Ducale in Parma in 1829. Although Bellini’s score contains moments of great beauty and sensitivity, *Zaira* proved the greatest setback of his career. Its eclipse, at least until it was revived in our own day in 1990, was complete and permanent: it received no other 19th century productions. A further setting of the libretto, by an obscure composer named Alessandro Gandini, apparently achieved no greater success when produced later that same year, 1829. This was, therefore, a libretto which brought with it little promise of popular success when Mercadante became the third composer to set it.

We must also bear in mind that it was a tragic subject, ending with the death of the heroine and the suicide of her lover–cum–slayer. The tragic ending, almost unheard–of on the Italian stage during the eighteenth century, was by now widely accepted – it could scarcely be anything else after the success of Bellini’s *Il pirata* (1827) and Donizetti’s *Anna Bolena* (1830). But it was still

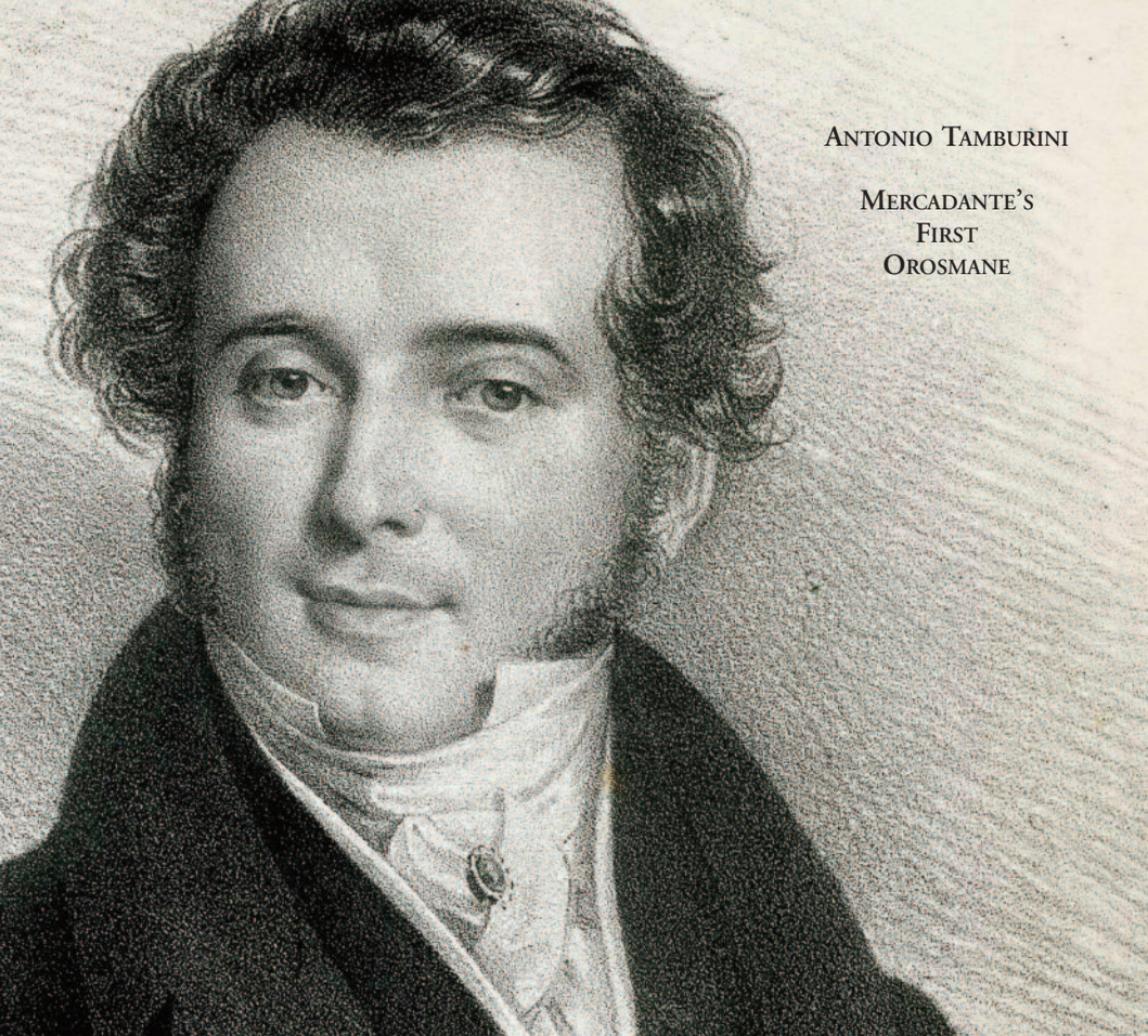
opposed by an unconvinced and disgruntled minority, particularly in more conservative states like Naples and Piedmont, where the operatic theatres were under the direct control and patronage of the ruling monarchs. The debate for and against the tragic ending arose most sharply whenever operas had to be chosen to celebrate gala occasions – to mark, for example, birthdays and namedays of ruling monarchs and prominent members of their families – but even on more general occasions, if a king maintained an opera house for the entertainment of his court and visiting foreign dignitaries, he did not wish to see their spirits dampened by what the Neapolitan censors of as late as 1837 could describe as ‘atrocious misdeeds, coldly meditated’. The argument erupted most memorably, of course, with the suppression of Donizetti’s *Maria Stuarda* following its dress rehearsal in Naples in 1834, but the reports of the Neapolitan police in the years both preceding and following this crisis confirm that there was a groundswell of reaction and disapproval simply waiting for appropriate occasions on which to make itself felt.

A third reason which would suggest that there must have been some doubts and misgivings concerning the outcome of this opera was that the company assembled at the Teatro S. Carlo was not of uniform excellence. No shafts of adverse criticism could be directed against Antonio Tamburini – probably the most elegant and stylish bass–baritone of the first half of the nineteenth century – and it is unlikely that any would have been levelled against the soprano, Giuseppina Ronzi De Begnis. The baritone who was cast as Lusignano, Giuseppe Fioravanti, was also a fine and admired performer. But the tenor, Lorenzo Bonfigli, was a weaker link, widely recognised as the Achilles’

heel of the company, a singer from whom it was less realistic to expect any great feats of excellence. Two years earlier, in 1829, he was described by the Milanese journal *I Teatri* as having ‘a beautiful and flexible voice’, but also as needing ‘to study better how to compose his mouth when singing, and how to repress certain placings of his voice which have nothing human about them’. Apparently he did little to benefit from such advice, for a year later, when he created the part of Tebaldo in Bellini’s *I Capuleti e i Montecchi* at the Teatro la Fenice in Venice, the composer himself remarked that ‘The tenor Bonfigli has excelled both himself and the public’s expectation, since he has rendered himself so antipathetic to all that they can no longer bear to look at him’. And now, in 1831, his facial contortions were apparently telling upon his voice, for, as we shall soon see, his timbre was no longer found pleasing. It was his presence and uningratiating performance that certainly caused Florimo to introduce his note of qualification when he said that the opera was ‘for the most part (*piuttosto*) well received’.

Mercadante, we know from his letters, gave full credit to Tamburini and Giuseppina Ronzi De Begnis for what he described as ‘the laurels of *Zaira*’. In a letter he wrote to Florimo from Turin soon afterwards, on 12 October 1831, he revealed an astute and pleasingly mischievous sense of humour when he sent them his greetings:

My infinite compliments to Tamburrini [sic] and his family, and may I never fail to perform my duty and recognise in him the support of my *Zaira*... That you will say to him when Ronzi is out of earshot, and the same thing vice versa... what rascals!



ANTONIO TAMBURINI

MERCADANTE'S
FIRST
OROSMANE

His admiration and warmth of feeling for Giuseppina Ronzi De Begnis went even further than this quotation would suggest, for in another letter, written later the same month, on 30 October, he wrote even more effusively:

Peppa has been pleased to write to me, and I assure you that she has given me infinite pleasure, since – I know not for what hidden reason – I feel myself drawn towards platonic love for this woman, this angel of Paradise, who enchants all who have the good fortune to approach her.

Ronzi De Begnis was, indeed, a remarkable woman – remarkable whether regarded as singer, actress or personality. She had been born in 1800, so was still barely into her thirties. But she was very much a seasoned artist, for she had made her debut in 1814, when she was scarcely into her 'teens, and had been on the stage ever since. Initially she had been a soprano of agility, performing the Rossinian repertoire, first in comic operas such as *Il barbiere di Siviglia* and *La Cenerentola*, but soon progressing to more dramatic parts in serious operas. Now, launching herself, as it were, into a second phase of her career, she was developing these dramatic abilities even further. From surviving accounts it is evident that she strove to give maximum expression and nuance to every word – to every note – that she uttered. This did not meet with everyone's approbation: the music publisher Guglielmo Cottrau, for example, could write in his letters to his family, collected and published many years later as *Lettres d'un mélomane* (Naples, 1885):

I don't know if I have ever spoken to you about M.^{me} De Begnis. I am scarcely one of her partisans and therein I am an exception, at odds not only with all our coterie, but with nearly the whole of the public. For her voice is supremely displeasing to me, and her expression always seems to me a little *outrée*, I might even say excessively nuanced – you understand me? – on every word and almost every note. But I must acknowledge that she has a admirable technique and great taste; and that, above all, she is a superb woman.

Cottrau was, however, as he himself acknowledges, an exception. With the public at large Ronzi De Begnis was a favourite, and her conscious cultivation of nuanced expression was soon to make her one of the most remarkable singers of the 1830's. She was, for example, a supreme interpreter of the operas of Donizetti, creating for him *Fausta* (1832), *Sancia di Castiglia* (1832), *Buondelmonte* (1834), *Gemma di Vergy* (1834) and *Roberto Devereux* (1837). Nor by rights should her Donizettian creations have stopped there, for she was also cast as the first Maria in *Maria Stuarda* when, for reasons that had nothing whatsoever to do with her, it was banned in 1834, and as the first Paolina in *Poliuto* when, for reasons equally extraneous to her, it was prohibited in 1838.

The reviews that greeted *Zaira* bear out everything that we have been suggesting. The opera itself met with approval, and Tamburini and Giuseppina Ronzi De Begnis came in for warm praise. Fioravanti, for reasons that are anything but clear, seems to have met with rather more mixed reactions. And Bonfigli? While most items in the opera were applauded, they included very few

of those in which he participated. *Il Caffè del Molo*, one of a number of Neapolitan news-sheets of this time that carried theatrical reviews, declared that:

ZAIRA and OROSMANE (signora Ronzi and signor Tamborini [sic]) gave themselves up to a fine rivalry of excellence. Ronzi was always Zaira, [caught] in the conflicts of love and religion... We shall always run to see her, to hear her, to admire her... And signor Tamborini? Whatever could be said in his praise would always fall short of his merit: a voice that is secure, pleasing and fearless, and an art that admirably supports it – these are the merits with which he showed himself abundantly provided. As we have said on other occasions, Tamborini is a singer who always sings, and sings well; and now more than ever he has confirmed us in our opinion. And Buonfigli [sic]? He did what he could. And Fioravanti? They wanted him to do what he could not, and he did it well enough. In short, the public gave their applause to all, and most of all to Signora Ronzi and to Signor Tamborini; and we subscribe with good heart to this judgment, and indeed declare it most just.

The cursory and cryptic comments passed here upon Fioravanti and Bonfigli excite curiosity and call for further comment. What was it that Fioravanti was asked to do but could not? The most likely conjecture – and we must underline that in the absence of further evidence it is only a conjecture – is to give a convincing portrayal of an old, broken and dying man. A singer who was at the height of his powers, Fioravanti was probably too robust for

some members of the audience willingly to suspend their disbelief. Others, however, just as certainly found his performance deeply affecting. In a finely impassioned passage of the Act I dungeon– scene terzetto for Zaira, Nerestano and Lusignano – the passage in which he recalls the slaughter of his wife and children in battle – another journal of the day, *L'Indifferente*, tells us that ‘Signor Fioravanti moved us to tears. He is as much an actor as he is a singer.’

Bonfigli, on the other hand, failed to excite enthusiasm since his stage presence was unsympathetic and his voice, or certainly his production of voice, grated. Unpleasing when heard on his own, he failed to blend with the other singers, and so jeopardised not only his solo items but also those he shared with his colleagues. Later in this article we shall have occasion to quote comments that leave no doubt of the veracity of this assertion.

The mounting of the opera also provoked mixed reactions. *L'Indifferente* ended its review by commenting:

Of the new sets, the square of Jerusalem is attractive and imposing; and well laid out the view of its seraglio. Wretched, deficient and patched together is the atrium, which the author would wish magnificent and redolent of all the grandeur of the East.

Quite apart from the reception accorded the singers and the work itself, the evening proved an opportunity to extend to Mercadante a happy welcome home to Naples. Even though he was not strictly a Neapolitan – he had been

born in Altamura in Puglia – he had trained at the Pietà de’ Turchini, one of four Neapolitan conservatoria which were eventually to merge as the single institution we know today, S. Pietro a Majella. He had, moreover, made his debut as a composer in Naples, with *L’apoteosi d’Ercole*, given with great success at the Teatro S. Carlo in 1819. The result of these strong formative links with Naples was that, throughout his career, his Pugliese origins tended to be downplayed or forgotten, and he was claimed instead as a Neapolitan composer. In somewhat similar fashion, even though Giuseppina Ronzi De Begnis is said to have been born in Milan and had certainly until this time pursued a wide-ranging international career, she was now an established and favourite artist in Naples and was looked upon as a ‘*concittadina*’. *Il Caffè del Molo* had no hesitation in claiming both composer and prima donna as born- and- bred Neapolitans, and opened its review with a veritable effusion of patriotic congratulation:

How the judge’s calling pleases us when it comes to giving credit to our fellow- citizens! [...] We would need to be without ears not to be surprised by the ZAIRA of our Mercadante; we would need to be without hearts not to be moved by the art of our Ronzi... Blessings upon you both! So the soil that gave you birth inherited from Nature not merely the gift of a salubrious air and a smiling sky...! Here there is a mountain that throws forth fire, and which, where the fine arts are concerned, leads the souls [of its children] to the most lively enthusiasm...

From the review that appeared in *L'Indifferente*, we know that Mercadante was called on to the stage after the dungeon– scene terzetto for Zaira, Nerestano and Lusignano – when the public greeted him ‘with the most lively affection’ – and again at the end of the opera. *L'Indifferente* rounded off its review by declaring:

At the end of the performance the Royal Prince applauded, and the public, with a new call for the Maestro and the principal singers to appear on the stage, applauded them once more, the former for his beautiful, rich and masterly composition, and the latter for their excellent performance. Long life, then, to the land that produces such sublime talents!

In view of such a reception, one is left wondering why the opera did not enjoy a more extensive stage– history – why it did not, like most successful works of the day, establish itself in the repertoire and go the rounds of all the theatres of Italy. Any explanation can only be tentative, but it may be relevant to point out that there was, for some months at least, contention over the ownership and publication of the score. The details of this friction are obscure, but from Mercadante’s letters we may glean that the score belonged to Barbaja and the Neapolitan publisher Girard, but had been secretly lodged, unbeknowns to Barbaja, with Cottrau. While the Neapolitan publishers would thus seem to have been divided against themselves, a Milanese rival, Francesco Lucca, stole a march on them and took advantage of the absence of copyright laws by printing, perhaps with Mercadante’s pre–knowledge and consent but

certainly with no one else's, a series of excerpts. And even Mercadante was soon to wince and write to Florimo with wry amusement: 'To crown everything, Signor Lucca has not even deigned to send me a complimentary copy: *Pazienza!*' Girard was furious; Barbaja threatened action against Mercadante; and Mercadante, relieved that the storm soon blew over, commented: 'Barbaja is happy when he can litigate, embroil and disquiet – a passion I do not share, for on the contrary I love peace, and salute her eternally, Amen.'

Even more to the point, the opera was probably simply overtaken and eclipsed by the rich succession of works with which Mercadante followed it: operas such as *I Normanni a Parigi* (Turin, 1832), *Emma d'Antiochia* (Venice, 1834), *Francesca Donato* (Turin, 1835) and *I briganti* (Paris, 1836), as well as numerous successful and effective works which followed his masterpiece *Il giuramento* (Milan, 1837). In an age which produced a plethora of new operas every year, only the very finest stood any chance of long survival.

Let us add that with each successive work Mercadante revealed an ever-increasing command of harmony and orchestration, and of the *motivo spiegato* – the typically flowing, unfolding and surging melody upon which he came increasingly to base his great architectural ensembles. Seen in this perspective, *Zaira* was soon to be remembered as a noteworthy and commendable link in a chain of development, but not as a pinnacle of achievement standing out prominently in its own right.

* * * *

The subject of the opera – originally suggested to Bellini by Florimo – comes from *Zaïre* (1732), one of the finest of the tragedies of Voltaire. It is a play which still to this day retains much of its power – and, indeed, much of its relevance. The theme is ostensibly the conflicting claims of religion and love, for Zaira is torn between the allegiance she owes to the Christian faith in which she was born, and the love she feels for the generous and benevolent Sultan Orosmane, who wishes to make her his wife. But this is to express it at its simplest, for it is in fact a degree more complex than this brief statement would suggest. Though born a Christian, it would seem that Zaira has, at the time the opera opens, abandoned Christianity as a result of her upbringing in Muslim surroundings. When, however, she discovers that Nerestano and she are brother and sister, and the long–lost children of the aged king Lusignano, she finds herself subjected to intense and fanatical pressures to revert to her Christian faith. In view of Voltaire’s lifelong protest against religious intolerance, it is not surprising that it is the Sultan Orosmane who emerges as the most sympathetic character: the love that he feels for Zaira is high–principled and magnanimous, rising above all prejudices of religion and race; and the love that Zaira gives him in return is spontaneous, natural and innocent. Lusignano and Nerestano are, by comparison, bigots, and many of us will doubtless regard their winning of Zaira back to her Christian ‘duties’ as an illustration, not so much of any commendable victory of religion over love, as of the evils that throughout history have been wrought in the name of religion. The bigotry of Lusignano and Nerestano – the influence of the former increased rather than diminished after his death – so twists and thwarts spontaneous human emotion that the plot inevitably ends in tragedy...

If this reading of the plot should be thought too blinkered and one– sided, let us rectify the balance by quoting part of Felice Romani’s own preface to the libretto, written at the time he prepared it for Bellini. Here he gives his own unbiassed and middle– of– the– road reading of the subject:

A young slave girl who, brought up in a seraglio and in love with the Sultan and loved by him in return, on the very day of her wedding discovers her father and her brother, Christian heroes, who recall her to a Faith which such a marriage would deny her... An ardent soul, torn between religion and love, close to succumbing to the most powerful of the passions that was, so to speak, born with her, and dismayed by the demands of a law which she has known for only a single day... The quakings, finally, and the doubts of an anguished heart which is horrified at its own love, yet does not cease to love... This is a subject which is supremely tragic...

Romani goes on to reveal in this preface that his main concern – his main challenge – in adapting Voltaire’s tragedy to the operatic stage was to produce a satisfactory work when necessarily having to exchange the expansiveness of a five–act tragedy for the constrictions of a two–act libretto, so submitting himself to ‘the barbarous law of an extreme brevity’. How, he asks, could he set in operation all the actors the subject assigned him, let alone add any further elements of his own? Under such circumstances he could only feel grateful that the play, written a century earlier, had remained known and read all that time: where he had been forced to abbreviate, an informed audience could expand and elaborate for themselves.



FELICE ROMANI

LIBRETTIST OF
ZAIRA

Despite having to work under these constrictions, he was able to claim that he had not only preserved Voltaire's characters in all their essentials, but had indeed succeeded in introducing certain new and positive elements of his own. The spectacle and variety of an opera, he believed, required colour, so wherever possible he had added 'that Oriental tint which is lacking in the Tragedy'. One would have to hear the whole of Mercadante's opera to know whether he anywhere took up this implicit invitation: certainly in the extracts recorded here there is no hint of oriental colour.

Equally importantly, Romani had expanded the character of Corasmino, changing him 'from the cold confidant that he was [in Voltaire] into a severe Muslim; so that, devoted as he is to the laws and customs of the Harem, he serves, so to speak, as a counterweight to the Sultan who casts such laws and customs out of mind'. In Bellini's opera this development of the character of Corasmino is mainly evident in the extended *Introduzione*, where he is given an aria which defines his rigidity of religious outlook. Fascinatingly, however, when we turn to Mercadante, we find that this *Introduzione* – whether by Romani or by someone else we cannot say – has been entirely rethought and recast. It is not until we reach Scene viii, or the third tableau (the scene in which Nerestano and Castiglione descend into the subterranean prison to meet the Christian prisoners), that the two texts join up and coincide.

The effect of this rewriting has been twofold. In the first place, if Romani thought he was being concise in the text he prepared for Bellini, the text as set by Mercadante is even shorter. And in second place, Corasmino, far from

retaining his importance as a principal character, is once more reduced to *comprimario* status, a briefly– spoken and often– disapproving confidant of Orosmane.

The reduction of the role of Corasmino has repercussions later in the score, too. In the finale to Act I a number of lines of text which in Bellini's opera belonged to Corasmino are in Mercadante's setting reassigned to Orosmane. And in the equivalent of the present Act II, scene vii, where Bellini composed a full–scale duet for Orosmane and Corasmino, Mercadante substitutes (to inferior words which are certainly not by Romani) a solo aria for Orosmane.

Also in the interests of brevity – or so one suspects – Mercadante omits an aria or 'Rondò' which was sung by Bellini's Nerestano in the equivalent situation to the present Act II, scenes iii, iv and v. Everywhere, in fact, the thought behind the revised libretto seems to be consistent: everywhere the changes point towards a wish to secure a text which should be clear and simple in its action, uncluttered with superfluous detail and incident. Yet, except in such moments as the final murder, Mercadante was not a composer whose primary aim was to match brevity of word with equal despatch of musical expression. There are many times when his music expands with exuberant floridity and repetition of verbal phrase. His concern, rather, would seem to have been to ensure that there should be time and room for such expansion. In Naples operas were not expected to last more than two hours: he would seem to have wished the expansion and contraction of his musical expression to be

dictated by the dramatic urgency of the action, not by the extraneous and artificial requirement of an overall duration of two hours.

This concern with brevity of poetic text also provides us with a probable explanation of one of the mysteries posed by the opera. In the printed libretto, Act I, scenes viii and ix – that is to say, the opening scenes of the tableau in the subterranean dungeon – are all *virgolati*, the technical term used when every line is preceded by double quotation marks, the convenient typographical method of the day to indicate passages which, occurring in the libretto, had been omitted by the composer in his musical setting. Yet here that explanation does not hold good, for consultation of Mercadante's score shows that he *did* set most of scene viii, and probably scene ix as well. The more likely explanation in this instance is that, even though set, the scenes were omitted in actual performance.¹

* * * *

It was only to be expected that four years' absence from Italy would have seen changes in Mercadante's musical style, and it comes as no surprise that the audiences who heard *Zaira* in 1831 were immediately struck by them. They

¹ In preparing this recording, long-standing problems of gaining access to the library of S. Pietro a Majella in Naples have meant that Opera Rara has had to work from a copyist score in the Archivio Ricordi in Milan – *not* from Mercadante's autograph. The copyist score contains the music for scene viii, but not for scene ix. Yet scene x is headed 'Recitative after the chorus of prisoners' – i.e. scene ix – which seems good evidence that Mercadante did, in fact, set *both* scenes.

recognised, for example, that there was now less dependence upon Rossinian models than there had been previously, and in its place a richer harmony, a greater sense of invention and experiment in the choice of instrumental colours and ostinato patterns, and a greater use of the *motivo spiegato* we have already mentioned. They were, of course, unable to place the opera in the perspective that privileged hindsight has now given us. Otherwise they would have realised that the composer was embarking upon what later musical historians recognised as his 'second period'. Once such hindsight and perspective became possible, we find a critic like Raffaele Colucci writing in the Venetian *La Scena* of 19 September 1867:

Mercadante sought to acquire a personal character, and to this just tendency we owe his new manner, broad and robust in his harmonisation, energetic in the movement he gave to the passions in his recitatives and strong in the general imprint of his music [...] Moreover to sustain his virile concepts in an adequate manner and give flesh to his potent musical ideas, he knew how to adopt robust orchestral forms that were richly nourished with martial sounds, which [in turn] were appropriate to the eminently heroic subjects he had undertaken to treat.

The composer's own statements, contained in his letters, are illuminating. Writing to Florimo from Turin on 23 November 1831, as he was composing his next opera, *I Normanni a Parigi*, he reported:

I Normanni a Parigi has me very busy, and in my usual fashion I am never happy with myself. In some ways it would be more bearable if I

had you beside me, and had your advice to help me; but instead here I am at my own mercy, and everything seems to me as bad as possible. If you should have some beautiful and new Cabaletta to send me, you would give me much pleasure, for I can find the first [introductory] movement and the *adagio*, but that accursed *Cappaletta* [sic]: it ruins everything for me, and the more I strive to make it new, the more I'm aware that [the results] are old– hat –

The trouble he was encountering in finding attractive cabaletta melodies was not peculiar to him alone. Many composers found that these final movements, fast– moving and extrovert, tended to triviality. Pacini, when he came to write his reminiscences, *Le mie memorie artistiche* (Florence, 1865), related how he would search for motifs that were melodically and rhythmically unusual and arresting, and then let the construction look after itself, since it could be based upon simple processes of repetition and contrast. And we are all familiar with some of the tawdry examples which disfigure even the greatest of the operas of Verdi's middle years, and of the way in which he gradually abandoned the cabaletta form and banished it from his scores.

Even more remarkable is Mercadante's better– known statement, made to Florimo on 1 January 1838, considerably later in his evolutionary process, with reference to *Elena da Feltre* (Naples, carnival 1837– 1838):

I have continued the revolution begun in *Il giuramento*: The forms are varied – Trivial Gabalettas [sic] are banished, the *crescendo* exiled – Tessiturars are less extended – there are fewer repetitions – There's some

novelty in the cadenzas – The dramatic aspect is better looked after – The orchestration is rich, but without covering the voices – Long solo passages have been removed from the concerted pieces, since they obliged the other parts to stand there coldly, to the detriment of the action – Little use of the bass drum, and very little of the band –

Others with more genius and more imagination can complete [this process], but I shall be happy to have started it – in accordance with your suggestions –

Those of us who are familiar with *Il giuramento* and *Elena da Feltre* may feel that in making this statement, Mercadante goes further than his actual practice. It is, however, a declaration of supreme interest for its intent: for its revelation of the direction in which his thoughts were moving.

* * * *

The present recording, while not a complete performance of *Zaira*, is certainly more than a mere selection of highlights. It presents scenes and extracts that are quite sufficiently substantial and extended to give a very good idea of the nature of the opera as a whole.

At the very outset we will be struck by the inventive and attractive orchestration of the march heralding the entry of Orosmane – orchestration, we should add, which changes with each successive enunciation or ‘variation’ of the material. We will also almost certainly note the way in which the

composer seeks to hold our attention through the use of an accented chord which is harmonically unexpected. It would be an exaggeration to say that the harmony is ‘challenging’ or ‘abrasive’, but it is certainly calculated to give the music extra muscular strength. And these features continue throughout the opera. Everywhere the harmony invigorates the melody; everywhere the choice of instrumental colour is striking and original; everywhere the ostinato figures are effective and more often than not complex. Indeed we quickly come to realise that here we have a composer who, while sharing the gift for vocal melody that was the common heritage of all Italian composers of the time, was very much aware of the need to seek ever new and varying ways of allowing the accompaniment to support, enrich and propel the melody. It is music in which the orchestration is as important as the vocal writing.

Orosmane’s following cavatina brings us a prime example of the ‘lyrical expansion’ to which we have referred. Tamburini was clearly a bass–baritone with remarkable facility of technique and, one suspects, a wide range of tonal colour, for this is *coloratura* writing in every sense of the word. Each verbal phrase of the text is repeated and elaborated; each musical phrase erupts in florid decoration. The movement as a whole may be leisurely and self-indulgent enough, but everywhere it is controlled by a sense of declamation: of bringing out the meaning of the words through emphasis, melisma or harmonic underlining. And when we reach the cabaletta, Mercadante introduces each verse with a florid cadenza for clarinet, and then proceeds to demand comparable floridity from his singer, enlivening the whole with constant elements of syncopation.

Yet all this is but introductory, occurring at the very outset of the opera. The emotional temperature—gauge has yet to rise, and the rewards of the score, as we should expect, become ever greater as it does so. The terzetto in which the aged Lusignano discovers that Zaira and Nerestano are his long—lost children proved a sensation when the opera was first performed, and deservedly so, for it is rich in telling dramatic effects, handled with skill. We would particularly draw attention to the extremely beautiful harmonic progression which follows Zaira's admission of her Muslim faith and which underlies Lusignano's shocked and all but speechless reaction; and the 'Verdian' ostinato figure which ushers in the immediately following *adagio*, Lusignano's 'Qui crudele'. There was once an Italian musicologist, Biagio Notarnicola, who did Mercadante's cause more harm than good by claiming that Verdi had 'plagiarised' many of his best ideas from his operas. Notarnicola would have done better, we believe, to have inverted the wording of his thesis, and to have shown in a more sympathetic manner the ways in which Verdi 'learned' from Mercadante; a terzetto like this displays a number of features which anticipate Verdi, this ostinato figure being one of the more conspicuous and remarkable.

The critic of *L'Indifferente* (September 1831) singled out this terzetto for particular praise:

It is of admirable effect both for its action and its singing, and in the fine words —

Qui crudele, in queste arene
Del tuo Dio fu sparso il sangue.
Qui spirar miei figli in guerra,
Qui tua madre io vidi esangue.
E tu puoi parenti e Dio
Rinnegar, tradir così?
Morto io fossi, ah! morto anch'io;
Se dovea mirar tal dì!

– the music is as eloquent as is the passion of a father who sees his child led astray from our holy Religion; and Signor Fioravanti moved us to tears.

Zaira is also remarkable for its fine duets. There are four of them, and three are included on this recording. The first, for Orosmane and Nerestano, 'Ei geme, sospira', was one of the items which conspicuously misfired at the premiere, thanks to the singing of Bonfigli. *L'Indifferente* spoke of:

... a *duet* for Orosmane and Nerestano (Signor Bonfigli), the *largo* of which contains musical beauties that are original, but which on account of the voice of Signor Bonfigli, which does not seem to us to blend with that of Signor Tamburini, did not please us.

The second, for *Zaira* and Nerestano, fared little better, and for precisely the same reason:

The [central] *largo* brings singing that is as beautiful, expressive and as penetrating as true repentance itself; the words... are the most beautiful yet. But this *piece* between Ronzi and Bonfigli was not applauded, and our Signor Impresario is perhaps not unaware of the reason.

By contrast the third, 'Deh! se tu m'ami, o barbara', for Orosmane and Zaira in Act II, met with the applause it merited, simply because it was performed by Tamburini and Ronzi De Begnis without the blighting presence of a tenor who alienated rather than engaged the sympathies of the audience.

For the sake of brevity we restrict our own remarks to the second of these duets, that for Zaira and Nerestano. It begins with a limpid melody over a triplet Alberti figure, and sounds for all the world as if it is going to be an exercise in thirds and sixths similar to, let us suggest, 'Prendi l'anel ti dono' from *La sonnambula*. Bellini's opera had been premiered only six months earlier, at the Teatro Carcano in Milan on 6 March 1831, and its immense success would help explain why, wittingly or unwittingly, Mercadante began his own item with the same notes. But it has only to reach its third phrase for us to find that it is diverging and embarking upon a series of modulations that give it a harmonic distinction all its own, while halfway through a sudden doubling of the accompanying triplet figure into a sextuplet figure for solo clarinet carries the second half forward with new interest and energy. Possibly the most noteworthy of all the items on this disc in terms of sheer beauty, it is an excellent example of the treasures that so often come tumbling forth when one lifts the scores of forgotten operas from library shelves...

The final scenes of *Zaira* are particularly strong. The penultimate item on this recording, Zaira's aria 'Che non tentai, per vincere', is sung when her anguish at having to abandon her lover in favour of her religion has reached its height. *L'Indifferente's* comments are again of interest. It proved, we are told...

... as surprising in its effect as it was tender, on account of the interesting situation it presents of a daughter who weeps, and of a funeral procession, seen passing in the distance, which accompanies the body of her dead father. Here in her acting we find Signora Ronzi... as true as she is expressive, although when she conveys terror, sometimes she opens her eyes so wide, and pulls her jaws back so far, that she brings to her beautiful face an expression that is displeasing.

The opening *andante* section of the aria is particularly beautiful. The first phrases could well have come from the pen of Bellini, but in true Mercadantian style the melody soon begins to modulate from key to key, and from one unexpected harmony to another. It should be noted, too, that there is no return to the original melody – no repetition of melodic material at all, in fact – but a continuous unfolding of ever– new ideas, always inspired by a meticulous attention to the words and their changing sentiments. An extended *tempo di mezzo* is devoted to the passing of Lusignano's funeral procession. Zaira faints, but then recovers to sing a most unusual cabaletta. This begins with an introductory *allegro* passage, highly expressive of her distraught state of mind ('Ah! crudeli, chiamarmi alla vita'), When we reach the cabaletta proper (at the words 'De' miei padri ho la fede tradita'), we find that, far from being a normal *allegro*, or even a *moderato* of the kind so favoured by Donizetti, it is virtually

a *lento* movement, strictly inspired by declamation and the emotional content of the words². After a few phrases, however, it begins to increase in speed, so that by the time we reach the florid running cadenza and the short *tempo di mezzo* for Fatima and the chorus we are moving at breakneck pace. The second verse brings a vastly truncated version of the introductory passage, but a complete reiteration of the '*lento– accelerando*' movement leading into a coda of equal excitement.

Remarkable though this aria is, it is, we would suggest, overshadowed by the finale, the most original and memorable item in the entire score: a quintet, 'Reggi i passi miei', for Zaira, Nerestano, Orosmane, Fatima and Corasmino. In terms of staging, the characters are in two groups: Zaira, Nerestano and Fatima are furtively making their escape through the gardens of the harem, while Orosmane and Corasmino lie in wait, ready to fall upon them. Both Romani in his words and Mercadante in his music realise that this is not an occasion for lyric outpouring: rather it must be an item of broken phrases and low whisperings. For at least half its length it is nothing more nor less than a series of broken *sotto voce* phrases, built over a sustaining accompaniment. One cannot even say that the melody is given to the orchestra, for in this opening passage there is, in fact, *no* melody – the accompaniment consists merely of a supporting repeated rhythmic pattern which is given interest by being

² Mercadante would seem to have recognised his own achievement and originality here, and to have carried his experimentation further on at least one subsequent occasion. Anyone who wishes to look at 'Arde già l'atroce guerra in *Orazi e Curiazi* will find an even more developed example of such a declamatory slow cabaletta.

modulated through several keys. It is not until we reach the midway point, at the words ‘Ciel pietoso!’, that the voices are given more sustained *legato* melodic lines. At this point, too, we may note that Fatima and Corasmino fall silent, so that what began as a *quintetto* ends as a *terzetto*. The total effect is highly unusual and original, totally integrated with the dramatic situation, and eloquently expressive of suppressed nervousness and tension. As it reaches its conclusion, Nerestano and Zaira try to make their escape – Orosmane leaps forward and slays Zaira – and Mercadante ends his opera with exemplary brevity.

Describing this final quintet, *L’Indifferente* called attention to ‘its fine distribution and interweaving of the voices’, and remarked – a phrase which it might well have been applied to the entire opera – that it showed Mercadante revealing ‘all his knowledge and study of his art’.

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THE STORY

ACT 1

SCENE ONE

In the great square of Jerusalem the populace has gathered to honour their popular Sultan, Orosmane, the 'Conqueror of Araby'. He accepts their homage, and also extends his greeting to Nerestano, a French knight who, released after many years' captivity, has been back to France and returned with the ransom money for ten further knights. In a gesture of generosity Orosmane offers him a hundred, but excludes from the bargain the aged Christian ex-king of Jerusalem, Lusignano, and a slave girl, Zaira, whom he intends to marry. Nerestano, who had hoped to buy the freedom of both, is particularly dismayed that Zaira should be denied him. Orosmane, confident of her love, agrees to let him see her, and even agrees that she may accompany him if she is willing to do so.

SCENE TWO

A magnificent atrium within the palace. Slaves dance, play harps and sing to entertain Zaira, who is joyfully looking forward to her marriage with Orosmane. Her confidante, Fatima, is a little shocked that she should so easily be brought to wed a Muslim, and to forget that she was born the daughter of a crusader, but as Zaira points out in reply, she never knew her parents or even their exact identity. Orosmane joins her, and they express their unbounded love for each other. Their happiness does not, however, long remain untroubled.

Nerestano appears for his interview with Zaira and reproaches her, since she had once vowed to accompany him back to France if he could raise her ransom money. While not denying the truth of his assertion, she insists that circumstances have changed, and that her earlier vow has now given place to another.

SCENE THREE

A subterranean chamber leading to the cells where the Christian prisoners – the erstwhile crusaders – are incarcerated. Nerestano greets Castiglione, his friend and former fellow-prisoner, who in turn ushers in the company of redeemed knights. All rejoice at the prospect of freedom.

Zaira brings news that Orosmane has yielded to her entreaties and agreed that Lusignano should also be set free. The feeble old king is led from his cell, and Nerestano and Zaira are presented to him as his liberators. They relate how they were captured when they were children – on the very day that Cesarea fell to the Arabs – and from a pendant hanging around Zaira's neck, Lusignano realises that they are his long-lost children. Their reunion is joyous – until Lusignano notes that Zaira is dressed in Arabian clothes. She confesses that, brought up at the Arab court, she has hitherto been a Muslim. Subjected to his bitter recriminations, she capitulates and declares her readiness to return to the Christian faith. At this point Corasmino, the Sultan's confidant, enters to announce that Orosmane has had second thoughts: for the moment the Christian knights are to remain in captivity, while Zaira is summoned back to Orosmane's presence.

SCENE FOUR

The atrium, as in Scene Two. Orosmane has yet again changed his mind. His earlier intransigence has been the result of Corasmino's influence; now he orders that Lusignano and the French knights be set free once more, and that Zaira be granted her wish to take a last farewell of Nerestano. When brother and sister meet, Zaira learns that Lusignano is dying, brought to his grave by his grief at her apostasy. Nerestano brings all possible influence to bear upon her, urging her to reject the Sultan's love and return to her Christian faith. As a result, when Orosmane returns and invites her to accompany him to the marriage ceremony, she hesitates and asks, since Lusignano is dying that their wedding be postponed. Orosmane agrees, but, suspicious of the role Nerestano is playing, warns him to quit Jerusalem before the following dawn.

ACT TWO

SCENE ONE

The atrium, as in Act One. Zaira, torn between her duty to return to her Christian faith and her love for Orosmane, is inclined to go to the Sultan and tell him all, but Fatima reminds her of his hatred for Lusignano and his family, and points out that she would be putting Nerestano's life in danger.

Orosmane, for his part, has been trying to come to terms with a growing suspicion that Zaira no longer loves him. He tells her that he has got the better of his passion and now feels only contempt for her. In grief, she declares her continuing love for him – but refuses to divulge the reasons she wishes to defer the wedding. Her refusal only increases Orosmane's suspicion that she has now fallen in love with someone else.

A distraught Nerestano tells Castiglione that Lusignano is no more. Apeled, one of the Sultan's officials, brings word that Orosmane has ordered the immediate departure of the French. He wishes them out of Jerusalem this very evening, for in the morning he intends to go through with his marriage to Zaira. In yet another gesture of generosity, however, he agrees that they should have time to bury Lusignano before they leave.

Corasmino tells Orosmane that a slave has been apprehended carrying a letter from Nerestano to Zaira. Opening the note, Orosmane discovers to his horror that it summons Zaira to an assignation in the harem gardens that evening, with the intention that the two of them – Nerestano and Zaira – should flee from Jerusalem together. Convinced that Nerestano must be Zaira's lover, Orosmane reseals the letter, and orders that it be carried to its destination.

SCENE TWO

A ground-floor room in the harem. Fatima brings Zaira the letter, which has been delivered by an unknown slave. Zaira is still unable to decide between her Christian duty and her love for Orosmane, but when from the window she sees Lusignano's bier born to its resting place, she gives way to a paroxysm of self-reproach, blaming herself for her father's death, and calling upon death to release her from her anguish.

SCENE THREE

A remote part of the gardens of the harem. Orosmane lies in wait to ambush Nerestano and Zaira. He reproaches himself for behaving like a petty criminal, but when Corasmino brings word that Zaira has replied to the letter, agreeing to the assignation, his jealousy gains the upper hand.

Zaira and Fatima appear, and duly meet with Nerestano, They are about to make their escape when Orosmane rushes forward and stabs Zaira. As she dies, she addresses Nerestano as 'brother', and for the first time Orosmane realises their true relationship. Nerestano invites him to slay him too, but, horrified at what he has done, Orosmane turns his dagger upon himself.

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RÉSUMÉ DE L'INTRIGUE

ACTE I

SCÈNE 1

Sur la grande place de Jérusalem, le peuple est rassemblé en l'honneur de son sultan bien-aimé, Orosmane, « Conquérant de l'Arabie », qui accepte leur hommage. Il salue ensuite publiquement Nerestano, chevalier français, de retour de France où, après plusieurs années de captivité, il est allé chercher le montant de la rançon exigée pour la libération de dix autres prisonniers. Dans un élan de générosité, Orosmane lui offre d'en libérer une centaine, mais en exclut l'ancien roi chrétien de Jérusalem, Lusignano, et une esclave, du nom de Zaïra, qu'il entend épouser. Nerestano, qui avait espéré acheter la liberté de ces deux derniers est profondément déçu de se voir refuser Zaïra. Orosmane, confiant dans la réciprocité de son amour, accepte de laisser le Français voir Zaïra, et va jusqu'à accepter de la laisser partir si elle le souhaite vraiment.

SCÈNE 2

Un magnifique atrium à l'intérieur du palais. Des esclaves dansent, jouent de la harpe et chantent pour distraire Zaïra, qui se réjouit de son union prochaine avec Orosmane. Sa confidente, Fatima, se dit assez choquée que voir sa maîtresse, oubliant qu'elle est fille de croisé, accepter si volontiers d'épouser un musulman ; Zaïra lui répond qu'elle n'a jamais connu ses parents ni même leur véritable identité. Orosmane vient la rejoindre et ils se jurent un amour éternel. Leur bonheur est cependant de courte durée. Il est troublé par l'arrivée de

Nerestano, venu comme prévu s'entretenir avec Zaïra. Il lui rappelle qu'elle s'était engagée à l'accompagner en France s'il parvenait à réunir l'argent de sa rançon et lui reproche d'être revenue sur sa promesse. Sans nier le bien-fondé de ses reproches, elle lui répond que les circonstances n'étant plus les mêmes, son sentiment a changé.

SCÈNE 3

Un souterrain menant aux cellules où sont enfermés les prisonniers chrétiens - d'anciens croisés. Nerestano salue Castiglione, son ami et ancien compagnon de captivité, qui lui présente les autres chevaliers. Ensemble, ils se réjouissent de leur libération prochaine.

Zaïra vient leur annoncer que cédant à ses prières, Orosmane a accepté de libérer également Lusignano. Le vieux roi affaibli quitte sa cellule et rencontre Nerestano et Zaïra, ses libérateurs. Ils lui racontent comment, alors qu'ils étaient encore enfants, ils ont été faits prisonniers le jour où Cesarea est tombée aux mains des Arabes ; reconnaissant le pendentif au cou de Zaïra, Lusignano comprend alors qu'il vient de retrouver les enfants qu'il avait cru à jamais perdus. Leur réunion se fait dans la joie jusqu'à ce que Lusignano remarque que Zaïra est vêtue à l'arabe. Elle lui avoue qu'élevée à la cour, elle a vécu comme une musulmane. Devant les reproches amères de son père, elle se soumet et se déclare prête à redevenir chrétienne. A ce moment-là, Corasmino, le confident du sultan fait son entrée pour annoncer qu'Orosmane s'est reviré : les chevaliers chrétiens resteront encore en captivité pendant un certain temps et Zaïra est appelée auprès d'Orosmane.

SCÈNE4

Le même atrium qu'à la scène 2. Orosmane a changé d'avis une nouvelle fois, l'intransigence dont il a fait preuve précédemment étant due à l'influence de Corasmino. Il ordonne maintenant la libération immédiate de Lusignano et des chevaliers français, et permet à Zaïra de faire, comme elle le souhaite, un dernier adieu à Nerestano. Lorsque le frère et la sœur se retrouvent face à face, Nerestano apprend à Zaïra que leur père se meurt, précipité dans la tombe par le chagrin que lui cause l'apostasie de sa fille. Nerestano utilise tous les arguments en son pouvoir pour faire pression sur Zaïra : Il l'exhorte à rejeter l'amour du sultan et à renouer avec la foi chrétienne. Aussi, après maintes hésitations, Zaïra finit-elle par demander à Orosmane, qui l'invite à venir sceller leur union, de reporter à plus tard la cérémonie de mariage. Orosmane accepte mais, se doutant du rôle de Nerestano dans l'affaire, ordonne à ce dernier de quitter Jérusalem avant le lendemain matin à l'aube.

ACTE II

SCÈNE1

L'atrium de l'acte I. Écartelée entre, d'un côté, son sens du devoir et, de l'autre, son amour pour Orosmane, Zaïra est tentée d'aller tout expliquer au sultan, mais Fatima lui rappelle qu'étant donné la haine de celui-ci pour Lusignano et sa famille, elle risquerait de mettre la vie de Nerestano en danger.

Orosmane, quant à lui, tente de s'habituer à l'idée que Zaïra a cessé de l'aimer. Il lui déclare qu'il a réussi à surmonter sa passion et n'éprouve plus que du mépris pour elle. Effondrée de chagrin, Zaïra lui assure qu'elle l'aime

toujours mais refuse de lui dévoiler les raisons pour lesquelles elle préfère repousser leur union. Son refus ne fait que renforcer Orosmane dans l'idée qu'elle s'est éprise de quelqu'un d'autre.

Nerestano, éperdu de douleur, annonce à Castiglione que Lusignano a rendu son dernier soupir. Apeled, l'un des hommes du sultan, vient leur annoncer qu'Orosmane a ordonné le départ immédiat des Français, et souhaite les voir quitter Jérusalem le soir même, car il entend épouser Zaïra dès le lendemain matin. Faisant la preuve une nouvelle fois de sa générosité, il leur donne le temps de mettre la dépouille de Lusignano en terre avant leur départ.

Corasmino apprend à Orosmane qu'on a appréhendé un esclave qui portait une lettre de Nerestano à Zaïra. Lorsqu'il ouvre la lettre, le sultan découvre à son horreur que Nerestano donne rendez-vous à Zaïra dans les jardins du harem le soir même pour fuir Jérusalem ensemble. Convaincu que Nerestano est l'amant de Zaïra, Orosmane referme l'enveloppe et ordonne qu'on la porte à sa destinataire.

SCÈNE 2

Une salle au rez-de chaussée du harem. Fatima remet à Zaïra une lettre apportée par un esclave inconnu. Zaïra hésite encore entre son devoir chrétien et son amour pour Orosmane, mais lorsqu'elle voit passer la bière de Lusignano devant sa fenêtre, elle s'adresse un torrent de reproches, s'accuse de la mort de son père et appelle de ses vœux la mort qui la délivrera de son tourment.

SCÈNE 3

A l'écart, dans les jardins du harem. Embusqué, Orosmane attend l'arrivée de Nerestano et de Zaïra. Il se reproche sa mesquinerie, mais lorsque Corasmino vient lui apprendre que Zaïra a répondu à la lettre et accepté le rendez-vous, sa jalousie ne connaît plus de bornes.

Zaïra et Fatima viennent rejoindre Nerestano, comme prévu. Ils s'apprêtent à fuir lorsque Orosmane se précipite sur eux et poignarde Zaïra. Mourante, elle s'adresse à Nerestano en l'appelant son "frère" et, pour la première fois, Orosmane comprend leur lien de parenté. Nerestano l'invite à l'assassiner à son tour mais, horrifié par ce qu'il vient de faire, Orosmane retourne le poignard contre lui-même et se donne la mort.

DIE HANDLUNG

1. AKT

1. SZENE

Auf dem großen Platz von Jerusalem haben sich die Menschen versammelt, um ihrem geliebten Sultan Orosmane, dem „Eroberer Arabiens“, zu huldigen. Er nimmt ihre Ehrung entgegen und begrüßt dann den französischen Ritter Nerestano, der nach seiner Freilassung aus jahrelanger arabischer Gefangenschaft nach Frankreich zurückkehrte und nun mit dem Lösegeld für zehn weitere Ritter in der Stadt eingetroffen ist. In einer Geste der Großzügigkeit verspricht der Sultan insgesamt hundert Gefangenen die Freiheit, nimmt allerdings Lusignano, den betagten christlichen Ex-König Jerusalems, sowie die junge Sklavin Zaira, die er zu heiraten gedenkt, von diesem Angebot aus. Doch eben diese beiden liegen Nerestano besonders am Herzen, vor allem aber Zaira. Orosmane ist sich der Liebe des Mädchens so sicher, dass er dem französischen Ritter gestattet, sie zu sehen, und ihr freistellt, diesen zu begleiten, wenn das ihr Wunsch sei.

2. SZENE

Ein prachtvolles Atrium im Palast. Sklavinnen tanzen, spielen die Harfe und singen zur Unterhaltung Zairas, die sich auf ihre Hochzeit mit Orosmane freut. Ihre Vertraute Fatima ist schockiert, wie leicht sie sich zur Hochzeit mit einem Moslem entschließen und vergessen konnte, dass sie die Tochter eines Kreuzritters ist. Zaira wendet ein, dass sie ihre Eltern nie kennen gelernt habe

und nicht einmal genau wisse, wer sie seien. Orosmane gesellt sich zu ihr, die beiden schwelgen in ihrer grenzenlosen gegenseitigen Liebe. Doch ihr Glück ist nicht von langer Dauer. Nerestano erscheint und wirft Zaira vor, sie habe geschworen, ihm nach Frankreich zu folgen, wenn er das Lösegeld beschaffen sollte. Das bestreitet sie nicht, erklärt aber, die Umstände hätten sich geändert, sie habe einen neuen Schwur geleistet.

3. SZENE

Eine unterirdische Kammer führt zu den Zellen, in denen die christlichen Gefangenen – die ehemaligen Kreuzritter – eingekerkert sind. Nerestano begrüßt Castiglione, seinen Freund und ehemaligen Mitgefangenen, der seinerseits die freigesetzten Ritter zu sich bittet. Bei der Nachricht über ihre bevorstehende Freiheit brechen alle in Jubel aus.

Zaira überbringt die Meldung, dass Orosmane ihrem Drängen nachgegeben hat und einwilligt, auch Lusignano freizulassen. Der gebrechliche alte König wird aus seiner Zelle geführt, Nerestano und Zaira werden ihm als seine Befreier vorgestellt. Sie schildern, wie sie dereinst als Kinder gefangen wurden – am selben Tag, an dem Caesarea an die Araber fiel -, und anhand eines Schmuckstücks um Zairas Hals erkennt Lusignano, dass es sich bei den beiden um seine verloren geglaubten Kinder handelt. Beglückt feiern sie ihr Wiedersehen, bis Lusignano bemerkt, dass Zaira arabische Kleider trägt. Die junge Frau erklärt, dass sie bislang Moslemin war, da sie am arabischen Hof aufgewachsen ist. Auf die bitteren Vorwürfe ihres Vaters hin erklärt sie sich schließlich bereit, zum christlichen Glauben überzutreten. In diesem Moment tritt Corasmino auf, der Vertraute des Sultans, und verkündet, Orosmane habe

seine Entscheidung widerrufen, die christlichen Ritter müssten noch in Gefangenschaft bleiben. Zaira wird zu ihm beordert.

4. SZENE

Dasselbe Atrium wie in der 2. Szene. Orosmane hat erneut seine Meinung geändert; sein vorheriger Sinneswandel ging auf den Einfluss Corasminos zurück. Nun befiehlt er die sofortige Freilassung Lusignanos und der französischen Ritter und gestattet Zaira, sich von Nerestano zu verabschieden. Bei dieser Begegnung erfährt Zaira, dass Lusignano im Sterben liegt; ihr Abfall vom Glauben habe ihm einen tödlichen Stoß versetzt. Nerestano bedrängt seine Schwester mit allen Mitteln, die Liebe des Sultans zurückzuweisen und zum christlichen Glauben zurückzukehren. Als dann Orosmane auftritt und sie auffordert, mit ihm zur Hochzeitszeremonie zu schreiten, zögert sie und bittet, die Trauung möge verschoben werden, da Lusignano im Sterben liegt. Orosmane willigt ein, befiehlt Nerestano – dessen Rolle ihm verdächtig erscheint – jedoch, Jerusalem vor dem Morgengrauen zu verlassen.

2. AKT

1. SZENE

Dasselbe Atrium wie im 1. Akt. Hin und her gerissen zwischen ihrer Liebe zu Orosmane und ihrer Pflicht, zum christlichen Glauben zurückzukehren, möchte Zaira zum Sultan gehen und ihn über alles aufklären, doch Fatima warnt sie davor – Orosmane hasse Lusignano und dessen Familie, Zaira brächte damit Nerestanos Leben in Gefahr.

Orosmane hegt mittlerweile den Verdacht, dass Zairas Liebe zu ihm erloschen ist. Er erklärt ihr, seine Leidenschaft für sie gehöre der Vergangenheit an, er empfinde nur noch Verachtung für sie. Außer sich vor Kummer beteuert sie ihm ihre Liebe – weigert sich aber, ihm den Grund für ihren Wunsch nach einer Verschiebung der Hochzeit zu nennen. Diese Weigerung bestärkt ihn wiederum in seinem Verdacht, dass ihre Liebe nun einem anderen Mann gilt.

Tief betrübt berichtet Nerestano Castiglione, dass Lusignano gestorben ist. Apeled, einer der Beamten des Sultans, verkündet, dass Orosmane die sofortige Abreise der französischen Ritter angeordnet hat. Sie sollen die Stadt noch am selben Abend verlassen, da er die Hochzeit mit Zaira für den kommenden Morgen angesetzt hat. In einer weiteren großzügigen Geste gestattet der Sultan den Rittern, vor ihrem Abzug Lusignano zu bestatten. Corasmino berichtet Orosmane, dass ein Sklave mit einem Brief Nerestanos an Zaira abgefangen wurde. Der Sultan öffnet den Brief und liest zu seinem Entsetzen, dass Zaira zu einem Treffen abends im Harem Garten aufgefordert wird, um gemeinsam mit Nerestano aus Jerusalem zu fliehen. Überzeugt, dass Nerestano der Geliebte Zairas ist, versiegelt der Sultan den Brief wieder und lässt ihn zustellen.

2. SZENE

Ein ebenerdiger Raum im Harem. Fatima überreicht Zaira den Brief, der von einem unbekanntem Sklaven gebracht wurde. Zaira kann sich noch immer nicht zwischen ihrer Pflicht als Christin und ihrer Liebe zu Orosmane entscheiden. Doch als sie sieht, wie Lusignano auf der Bahre zu seinem letzten Ruheplatz getragen wird, wird sie von Reuegefühlen übermannt. Sie macht sich bittere Vorwürfe wegen des Todes ihres Vaters und wünscht sich ihrerseits den Tod herbei, um von ihrer Qual erlöst zu werden.

3. SZENE

Ein abgelegener Teil des Harnesgartens. Von einem Versteck aus wartet Orosmane auf Nerestano und Zaira, um sie zu belauschen. Zwar verachtet er sich dafür, wie ein gemeiner Dieb vorzugehen, doch nachdem Corasmino ihm berichtet hatte, dass Zaira den Brief beantwortet und in das Treffen einwilligt habe, gewann seine Eifersucht die Oberhand.

Zaira und Fatima erscheinen und treffen sich mit Nerestano. Gerade wollen sie fliehen, als Orosmane aus seinem Versteck stürzt und Zaira ersticht. Im Sterben spricht sie Nerestano als „Bruder“ an. Nun wird Orosmane ihr wahres Verhältnis bewusst. Nerestano fordert ihn auf, auch ihn zu erstechen, doch Orosmane, entsetzt über seine Tat, wendet den Dolch gegen sich selbst.

AGROMENTO

ATTO 1

SCENA PRIMA

Nella grande piazza di Gerusalemme il popolo riunito festeggia il suo amato sultano, Orosmane, “Conquistatore d’Arabia”, il quale accetta l’omaggio e saluta Nerestano, un cavaliere francese che, liberato dopo numerosi anni di prigionia, è rientrato in Francia e ha fatto ritorno con il denaro per il riscatto di altri dieci cavalieri. In un gesto di generosità, Orosmane gliene offre cento, ma esclude dall’accordo il vecchio Lusignano, un tempo re cristiano di Gerusalemme, e la schiava Zaira, che intende sposare. Nerestano, che aveva sperato di acquistare la libertà per entrambi, è particolarmente deluso che Zaira gli venga negata. Orosmane, sicuro dell’amore della donna, gli concede di vederla e accetta persino che lei lo accompagni se lo desidera.

SCENA SECONDA

Uno splendido atto nel palazzo. Alcune schiave danzano, suonano l’arpa e cantano per intrattenere Zaira, che attende con gioia le proprie nozze con Orosmane. La sua confidente Fatima è un po’ scandalizzata che lei si lasci convincere così facilmente a sposare un musulmano, dimenticando di essere figlia di un crociato, ma Zaira le risponde che non ha mai conosciuto i propri genitori né la loro precisa identità. La raggiunge Orosmane e i due si dichiarano reciprocamente amore infinito. La loro felicità non è tuttavia destinata a durare. Compare Nerestano per il suo colloquio con Zaira e le rinfaccia di aver tradito

il giuramento di riaccompagnarlo in Francia se lui avesse ottenuto il denaro del riscatto. La donna ammette che è vero, ma insiste che le circostanze sono mutate e che la sua promessa precedente adesso è stata sostituita da un'altra.

SCENA TERZA

Un sotterraneo che conduce alle celle dei crociati cristiani prigionieri. Nerestano saluta Castiglione, suo amico ed ex compagno di prigionia, il quale a propria volta fa entrare il gruppo di cavalieri liberati con il riscatto. Tutti si rallegrano alla prospettiva della libertà.

Zaira porta la notizia che Orosmane ha ceduto alle sue suppliche e ha accettato di lasciare libero anche Lusignano. L'anziano e debole re viene portato fuori dalla sua cella. Nerestano e Zaira gli vengono presentati come liberatori e raccontano di essere stati catturati da bambini, il giorno stesso in cui Cesarea era caduta in mano agli Arabi. Vedendo un ciondolo al collo di Zaira, Lusignano si rende conto che i due sono i figli che credeva ormai perduti. La felicità di essersi ritrovati viene oscurata però nel momento in cui Lusignano si accorge che Zaira indossa vesti di foggia araba. La donna confessa che, essendo stata allevata alla corte araba, è musulmana ma, davanti alle amare recriminazioni del padre, dichiara di essere disposta a ritornare alla fede cristiana. A questo punto entra Corasmino, confidente del Sultano, e annuncia che Orosmane ha cambiato idea: i cavalieri cristiani dovranno rimanere prigionieri e Zaira viene richiamata alla presenza di Orosmane.

SCENA QUARTA

L'atrio della seconda scena. Orosmane ha cambiato idea ancora una volta. La sua iniziale intransigenza era dovuta all'influenza di Corasmino; adesso ordina che Lusignano e i cavalieri francesi vengano liberati ancora una volta e che Zaira veda esaudito il desiderio di dare l'ultimo addio a Nerestano. Quando fratello e sorella si incontrano, Zaira viene a sapere che Lusignano sta per morire di dolore per la sua apostasia. Nerestano cerca di esercitare su di lei tutta la sua influenza, sollecitandola a respingere l'amore del Sultano e ritornare alla fede cristiana. Di conseguenza, quando Orosmane ritorna e la invita ad accompagnarlo alla cerimonia di nozze, la donna esita e chiede che le nozze vengano rimandate poiché Lusignano sta per morire. Orosmane accetta ma, sospettoso del ruolo di Nerestano, gli dice di partire da Gerusalemme prima dell'alba seguente.

SECONDO ATTO

SCENA PRIMA

L'atrio del primo atto. Zaira, combattuta tra il dovere di ritornare alla fede cristiana e il suo amore per Orosmane, è tentata di andare dal sultano e rivelargli tutto, ma Fatima le ricorda l'odio che l'uomo nutre per Lusignano e la sua famiglia e sottolinea che in questo modo metterebbe in pericolo la vita di Nerestano.

Da parte sua Orosmane ha cercato di rassegnarsi alla prospettiva che Zaira non lo ami più. Le dice che ha dominato la propria passione e adesso prova solo disprezzo per lei. Addolorata, la donna dichiara di amarlo ancora, ma

rifiuta di rivelare le ragioni per cui desidera rimandare le nozze. Il suo rifiuto non fa che accrescere i sospetti di Orosmane che la donna sia adesso innamorata di un altro.

Sconvolto, Nerestano comunica a Castiglione che Lusignano è morto. Apeled, uno degli ufficiali del sultano, comunica che Orosmane ha ordinato la partenza immediata dei francesi. Desidera che lascino Gerusalemme la sera stessa, perché il mattino dopo intende celebrare le proprie nozze con Zaira. In un altro gesto di generosità, tuttavia, accetta di concedere loro tempo sufficiente per seppellire Lusignano prima di partire.

Corasmino comunica a Orosmane che è stato catturato uno schiavo latore di una lettera di Nerestano per Zaira. Orosmane la legge e scopre con orrore che si tratta di un invito a un appuntamento nel giardino dell'harem quella notte, con l'intento di far fuggire Zaira con Nerestano da Gerusalemme. Convinto che Nerestano sia l'amante di Zaira, Orosmane sigilla nuovamente la lettera e ordina che venga consegnata alla sua destinataria.

SCENA SECONDA

Una sala al pianterreno dell'harem. Fatima porta a Zaira la lettera consegnata da uno schiavo sconosciuto. Zaira è ancora combattuta tra il dovere cristiano e l'amore per Orosmane ma, quando vede passare dalla finestra il feretro di Lusignano che viene portato alla sepoltura, si abbandona a un parossismo di rimorso, si dichiara colpevole per la morte del padre e invoca la morte perché la liberi dalla propria angoscia.

SCENA TERZA

Un angolo nascosto del giardino dell'harem. Orosmane è in agguato per sorprendere Nerestano e Zaira. Si rimprovera di comportarsi come un misero criminale ma, quando Corasmino gli dice che Zaira ha risposto alla lettera, accettando il convegno, la gelosia ha il sopravvento.

Entrano Zaira e Fatima per incontrarsi con Nerestano e stanno per darsi alla fuga quando Orosmane si precipita fuori e pugnala Zaira. La donna, morente, si rivolge a Nerestano chiamandolo “fratello”, e per la prima volta Orosmane si rende conto della vera natura del loro rapporto. Nerestano lo incita a uccidere anche lui ma, inorridito da quello che ha fatto, Orosmane rivolge la spada contro se stesso.

A portrait of a woman with short, reddish-brown hair, looking slightly to her left. She is wearing a dark green top with a small floral pattern. The background is a blurred green plant. The lighting is soft and natural.

Majella Cullagh

ZAIRA

Melodramma tragico in two acts

Libretto by Felice Romani

Music by Saverio Mercadante

First performance 31 August 1831

Teatro S. Carlo, Naples

ORIGINAL CAST

Orosmane, Sultan of Jerusalem.....	Antonio Tamburini
Lusignano, a prince of the blood of the Kings of Jerusalem.....	Giuseppe Fioravanti
Zaira, a slave of Orosmane.....	Giuseppina Ronzi De Begnis
Nerestano, a French knight.....	Lorenzo Bonfigli
Corasmino, confidant of Orosmane.....	Signor Lombardi
Fatima, confidante of Zaira.....	Virginia[?] Eden
<i>minore</i>	
Castiglione, a French knight.....	Signor Minieri
Apeled, an official of the Sultan.....	Giovanni Revalden

Mohammedan nobles and soldiers, Slaves
Populace, Christian slaves, French squires
Mohammedan guards.

The opera takes place in Jerusalem.

Passages in this libretto where the lines are preceded and eventually closed by double quotation marks formed part of Romani's libretto, but were not set by Mercadante.

For easy reference the text of the selections recorded for this album of highlights is

printed in blue.

ACT ONE

SCENE I

The great square of Jerusalem in front of the seraglio, the doors of which are manned by guards.

Mohammedan soldiers and townspeople; Christian slaves. Then Corasmino.

CHORUS

divided into several groups

Ecco di gioia il dì;
Popoli, uscite.
Il lutto omai finì:
Cessò il dolor.
Di gloria, e di splendor
Ecco il bel dì.
Col giubbilo nel cor
Gente, venite
A festeggiar,
Ad onorar
D'invitto genitor
Il degno successor
In Orosman.
Di gloria, di splendor
Ecco il bel dì.

Here is the day of rejoicing;
People, come forth.
Our period of mourning is over:
Grief is at an end.
This is the shining day
Of glory, of splendour.
With joy in your hearts,
People, come forth
To celebrate,
To honour
In Orosman
The worthy successor
Of an invincible father.
Here is the shining day
Of glory, of splendour.

CORASMINO

to the Christians

Schiavi, di Nerestano
Io vi annunzio l'arrivo. Lo vedrete,

Slaves, I am here to tell you
Of the arrival of Nerestano. You will
see him,

E respirare in sì bel dì potrete.
on such an auspicious day.

You will be able to breathe freely again

(There is a sound of military music, announcing the approach of Orosmane.)

[1]

Senti... senti... le grida, i concenti!
Egli arriva... la gioja più viva
Lo precede, trasporta ogni cor.

CHORUS

Listen... listen... the shouts, the clamour!
He is here... the liveliest joy
Precedes him, and carries away every
heart.

SCENE II

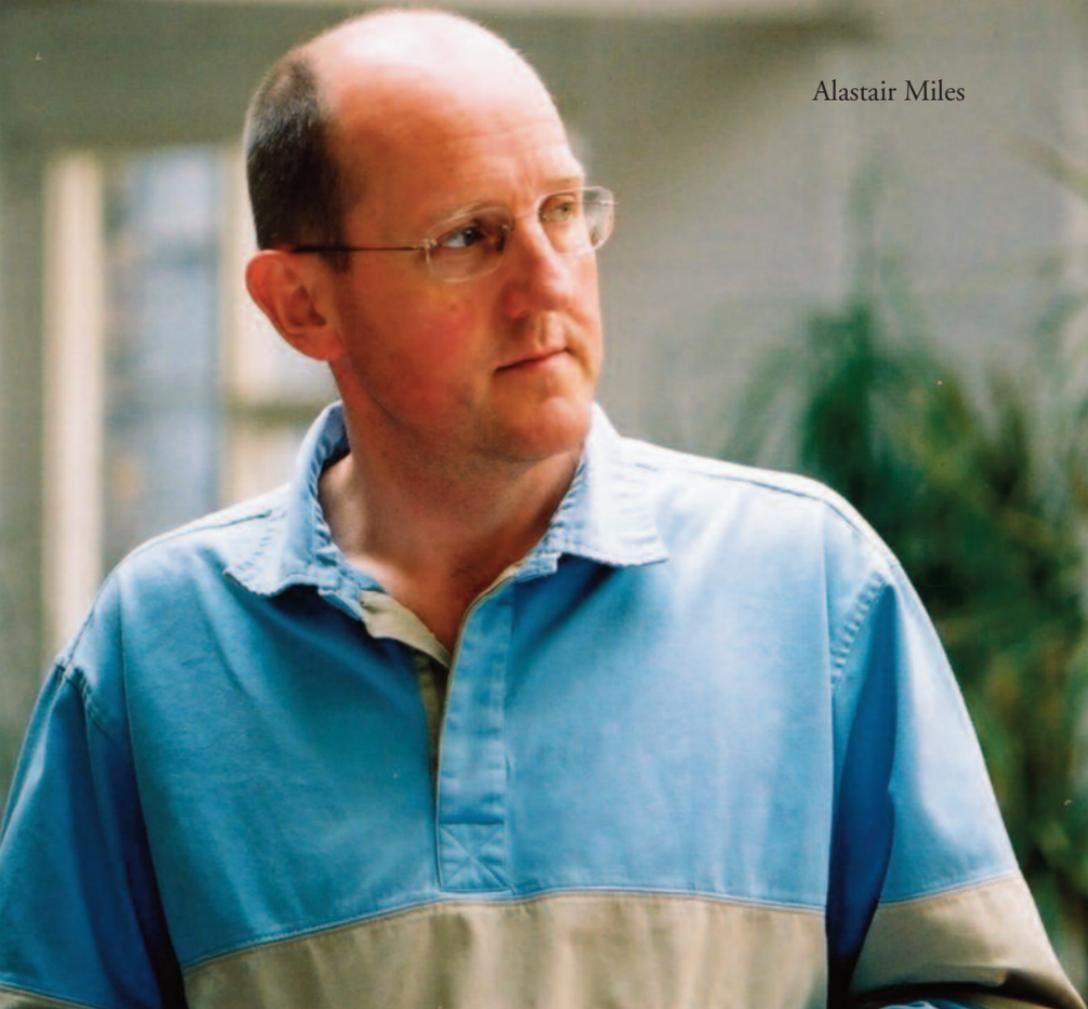
Orosmane appears, preceded by guards. The French draw back to one side.

Gloria a Orosmane! onor
D'Arabia al vincitor,
Nato a regnar,
A trionfar.
A un popolo fedel,
“Degno del suo favor,”

CHORUS

Glory to Orosmane! Honour
To the conqueror of Araby,
Born to reign
And triumph.
Heaven granted him
To a faithful people,

Alastair Miles



Lo donò il ciel.

[2]

Liete voci! bei voti! v'intendo:
A quest'anima dolci scendete;
Voi soave l'impero rendete
A chi ambisce regnar per l'amor.
Voi gli amici, i miei figli sarete:
A voi sacro è il mio brando e il mio cor.

E tu oggetto - a noi caro e diletto
Sarai sempre di fede e d'amor.

Voi sperate. Te, lieto, rivedrò:

Testimon' di mia gioia sarai.
Ogni palpito e duol cessi omai,
Del piacer tutto spiri l'ardor.

Ogni palpito e duol cessi omai,
Del piacer tutto spiri l'ardor.
pleasure.

[3]

Ah sì, questo di mia vita
Il più bel dì sarà.
Appien vedrò compita

“Worthy of its favour”.

OROSMANE

Joyous voices! fine tributes! I hear you:
You fall sweetly upon my soul;
You make sway sweet to him
Who aims to reign through love.
You will be my friends, my children:
Both sword and heart I dedicate to you.

CHORUS

And you – our dear delight – will ever
Be the object of our faith and love.

OROSMANE

to the French

And you, take heart. Happily I see you
again:
I wish you to witness my joy.
Let every tremor and sorrow cease,
Let everything breathe the transports of
pleasure.

OROSMANE & CHORUS

Let every tremor and sorrow cease,
Let everything breathe the transports of

OROSMANE

Ah yes, this will be
The crowning day of my life.
I shall see my happiness

La mia serenità.
Divida ognun il giubbilo
Che il cor brillar mi fa.

Sì, lieta la tua vita
Serbare il ciel vorrà,
“E rendere compita
“La tua serenità.”
Divide ogni alma il giubbilo
Che il cor brillar ti fa.

(At a sign from Orosmane all retire, with the exception of his guards.)

SCENE III

Nerestano enters, accompanied by two squires, each of whom carries a covered charger.

Nemico generoso,
Un dì mio vincitore, a te ritorno
Mantenitor della mia fè; la tua
Or mi serba. Di dieci cavalieri,
Qui illustri prigionieri,

Di Zaira, di Fatima il riscatto
Io ti reco: sien liberi... Ma il mio
Unirvi non poss'io; tutta consunta
In sì nobile oggetto è mia fortuna.

Come to full fruition.
Let each one of you share the joy
That makes my heart exult.

CHORUS

Yes, heaven will wish to keep
Your life joyful,
“And bring your happiness
“To full fruition.”
Every soul shares the joy
That makes your heart exult.

NERESTANO

My generous enemy,
Once my conqueror, I return to you
In fulfilment of my oath; now do you
Keep your oath to me. I bring you
The ransom money for ten knights, held
here
As illustrious prisoners, and for Zaira
And Fatima: let them be set free... But
I cannot add my own ransom: my fortune
Has been all consumed in such a noble

Ma, di me pago e altero,
Io torno a' ceppi miei, tuo prigioniero.

T'ammiro, o Nerestano;
Ma vincere Orosmane spero invano
In generoso cor. Vanne; riprendi
Tua libertà; riporta
L'oro di que' riscatti, e d'addoppiarlo

A me lascia il contento.

Ma...

Non sol dieci cavalier', ma cento
Ne voglio a te donar.

E vuoi tu dunque
Ognora trionfar?

L'Europa apprenda
Che pur nel fondo della Siria esiste
Qualche virtù; che non ha solo il vanto
D'esser madre d'eroi.

cause.

But, proud and at ease in my conscience,
I return to my shackles, your prisoner.

OROSMANE

I admire you, Nerestano;
But you hope in vain to excel Orosmane
In generosity of heart. Go; reassume
Your liberty; carry back the gold
You have brought to redeem these
prisoners, and leave me
The happiness of doubling it.

NERESTANO

surprised

But...

OROSMANE

I wish to present you, not merely
With ten knights, but a hundred.

NERESTANO

Is it your wish, then,
Ever to be the conqueror?

OROSMANE

Let Europe learn
That even in the depths of Syria
Some virtue's to be found; that Europe
Is not alone in boasting herself the
mother of heroes.

NERESTANO

Oh! tu arrossir la fai.

Oh! you make her blush for shame.

OROSMANE

Or, tranne Lusignan, sceglier potrai
I prigionier'.

Now, with the exception of Lusignan,
You may choose your prisoners.

NERESTANO

in the greatest surprise

Non Lusignano!

Not Lusignano!

OROSMANE

Ei scende

He is descended

Da lor che un giorno in Solima regnaro.
Già vinto da mio padre in Cesarea,

From those who once reigned in Solima.
Though formerly defeated by my father
in Cesarea, he yet

Potria vantar su questo soglio un dritto:
Quindi egli è periglioso. Io lo compiango;
Ma prigionier morrà.

Could boast a right over this realm:
Hence he poses a danger. I pity him;
But he will die in captivity.

NERESTANO

Vecchio infelice!

Unhappy old man!

OROSMANE

Fatima pur ti cedo, s'ella assente
D'abbandonar Zaira.

Yet Fatima I surrender to you, provided
She agrees to leave Zaira.

NERESTANO

forcefully

Nè Zaira
Meco verràà?

May Zaira
Not come with me either?

OROSMANE

equally forcefully

Zaira!

Zaira!

NERESTANO

Sì, promessa
N'ebbi da Noradino;
Il mio Sovran l'aspetta,
Ed è là il suo riscatto. A me la rendi...

OROSMANE

Sai tu a chi parli? sai quel che pretendi?

Yes, I had
Noradino's promise;
My Sovereign expects her, and there is
Her ransom. Give her to me...

Do you know to whom you speak? what
it is you ask?

V'ha riscatto per Zaira?
Qual Sovran può a me involarla?
I miei stati, per serbarla,
La mia vita io perderò.

Is there ransom to equal Zaira?
What Sovereign can steal her from me?
I would lose my states,
Surrender my life to keep her.

NERESTANO

Ma sai tu qual'è Zaira?
Sai che nacque a nostra fede?
Se lealtà, se onor qui han sede,

But do you know what you have in Zaira?
Do you know she was born in our faith?
If truth to one's word, if honour has
any place here,
I shall lead her away with me.

Io con me la guiderò.

OROSMANE

Mai Zaira non avrai.

Never will you have Zaira.

NERESTANO

L'ami tu forse?

in a sudden burst of anger

Do you perhaps love her?

OROSMANE

E in te qual brama?

And what is this covetous wish of yours?

(Qual trasporto!)

[4]

Ed ella t'ama?

Da lei stessa lo saprai.

La vedrò?

Sì, la vedrai.

(Ciel! ma qual la rivedrò?)

(Ciel! e che pensar dovrò?)

(Ei geme, sospira,
Mal cela un ardore...
Se un giorno d'amore
Per essa avvampò...
Se amante... Ah! no, no;
Il core di Zaira
Tradirmi non può.)

(Ei freme, sospira,
Palesa un ardore...
Se intanto d'amore
Per essa avvampò...

(How he is carried away!)

NERESTANO

And does she love you?

OROSMANE

That you learn from her herself.

NERESTANO

I shall see her?

OROSMANE

Yes, you will see her.

NERESTANO

(Heavens! but what shall I find her when
I see her?)

OROSMANE

(Heavens! what am I to make of this?)

(He groans, he sighs,
He ill conceals a passion...
If once his heart
Beat with love for her...
If he was her lover... Ah! no, no;
Zaira's heart is incapable
Of so betraying me.)

NERESTANO

(He shudders, he sighs,
His passion is manifest...
If in the interim he has
Fallen in love with her...

S'ei stesso... Ah! no, no;
Di fede Zaira
Mancare non può.)

E a lei quando?...

Fra brev'ora.

E a seguirmi s'ella assente?

Tanto sperì!

E allor...

Allora...

Ella... sì... con te verrà.

(Qual presagio, ahimè, funesto!
Più s'accresce il mio timor.
Giusto ciel, da cruda smania
Inondar mi sento il petto;
Dal più fiero e rio sospetto
Lacerar mi sento il cor.)

If he himself... Ah! no, no;
Zaira cannot be false
To her faith.)

And when may I see her?...

OROSMANE

Very soon.

NERESTANO

And should she agree to follow me?

OROSMANE

Do you have such hopes!

NERESTANO

What then?...

OROSMANE

Then...

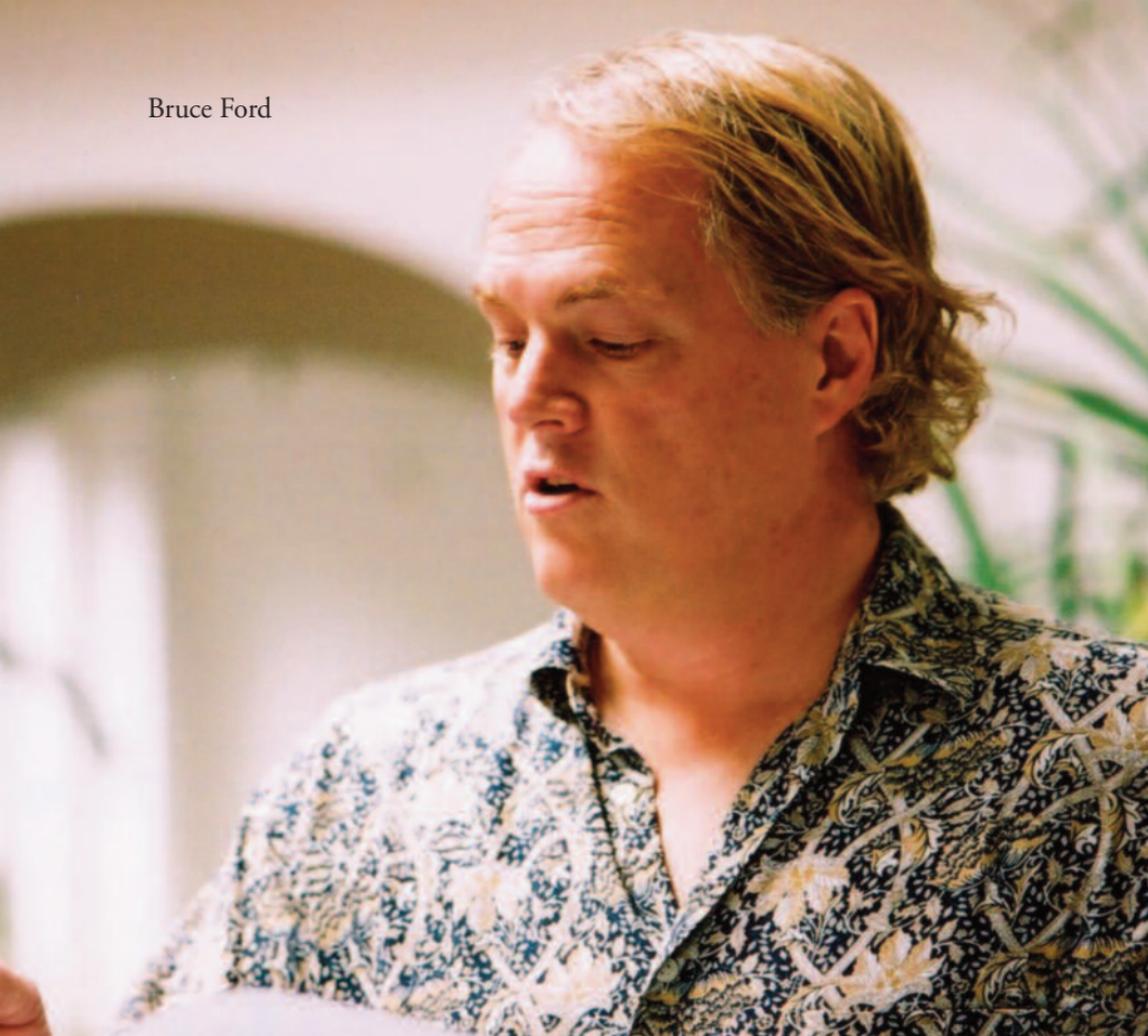
Yes... she will accompany you.

TOGETHER

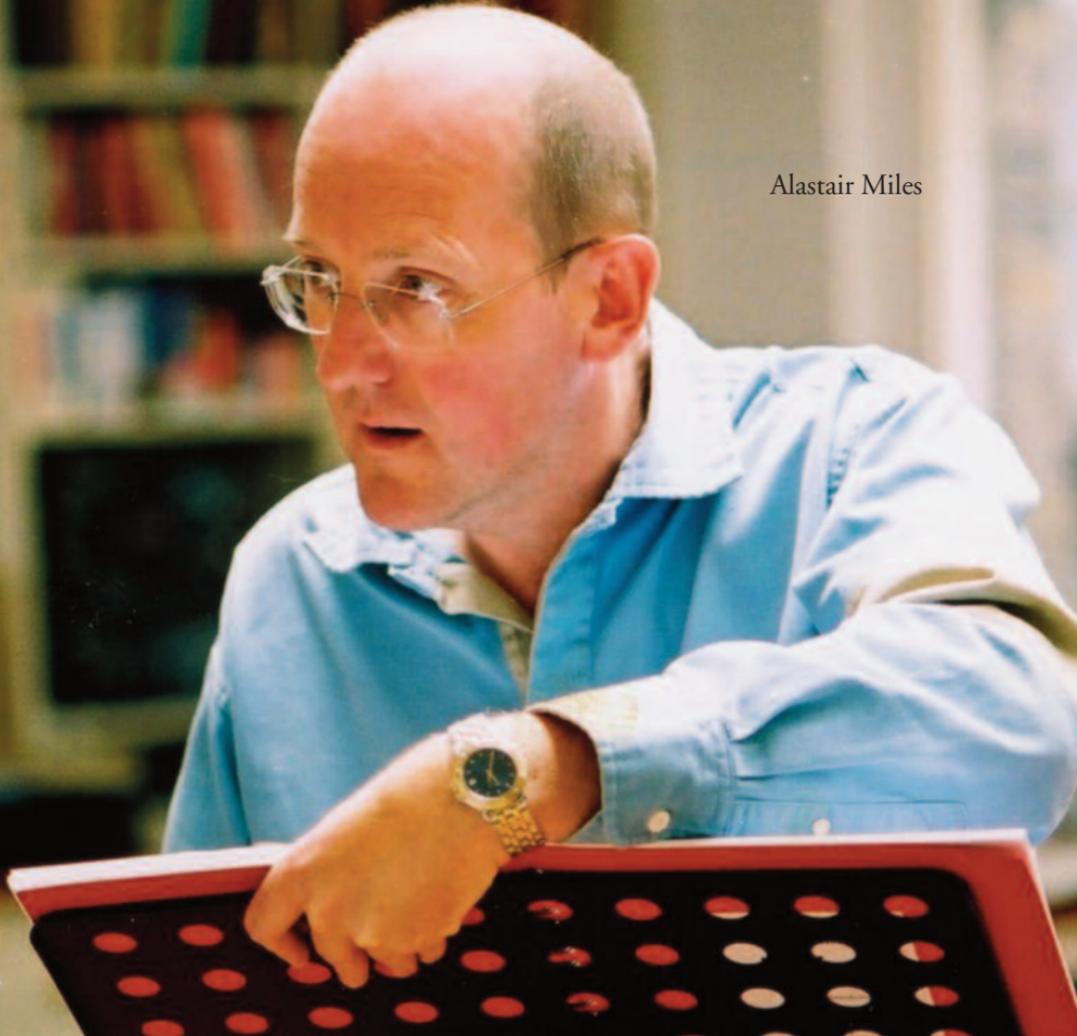
(Alas! what an evil omen!
My fear is ever increasing.
Ye Gods, I feel my breast
Overwhelmed by cruel anguish;
I feel my heart torn apart
By the fiercest, blackest suspicion.)

(They depart.)

Bruce Ford



Alastair Miles



SCENE IV

A magnificent atrium in which all the opulence of the East is to be seen. An archway at the rear is closed by a silken curtain.

Various slaves who are dancing, and others who are playing harps and singing, usher in Zaira.

Là de' felici – nel bel soggiorno
Incantatrici – errano intorno
Celesti Urridi, figlie d'amor,
Di voluttà, gioie de' cor.
Ma Urride colà, Zaira, non v'è
Che a te di beltà, modestia e candor
Non ceda l'onor.

Urride colà
Più bella di te, Zaira, non v'è.

Compagne, amiche, a vostri
Dolci concenti, al vostro amor, Zaira
D'inusitata gioia esulta appieno.
(Ma la gioia maggiore

CHORUS

There in this beautiful dwelling
There wander about happy, bewitching,
Heavenly Houris, the daughters of love
And of pleasure, the joy of every heart.
But there is no Houri there, Zaira,
Who does not yield the place of honour
To you, in beauty, modesty and openness
of heart.

There is no Houri
There, Zaira, fairer than you.

ZAIRA

Companions, friends, with unaccustomed
joy
Zaira takes the greatest delight in your
Sweet harmonies and expressions of love.
(But the greatest joy

Ch'ora m'inonda il core,
E' il pensar che fra poco
La destra io stringerò del caro amante...
Vieni, più non tardar, beato istante!

Sparì dagli occhi il pianto,
Nè più penar degg'io;
Accanto all'idol mio
Contenta alfin sarò.
Ch'è lieto, mi dirà;
Lo stesso io gli dirò;
Con me palpiterà,
Con lui sospirerò.
I dolci contenti
Son questi, mio cor,
Son questi i momenti...
Cessato è il dolor.)

(Oh come in quel volto
E' il giubbilo accolto!
Oh come dell'anima
Esprime l'ardor!)

SCENE V

Fatima, Zaira and slaves.

That now engulfs my heart
Is the thought that soon I shall grasp
My dear love's hand in wedlock...
Come, blessed moment, delay no more!

The tears have vanished from my eyes,
I am to suffer no more;
At the side of the man I idolise
I shall at last be happy.
He will tell me he is blithe;
I shall say the same to him;
His heart will beat in time with mine,
My sighs will measure time with his.
O my heart, these are
Your sweet contents,
These are the moments...
Grief is at an end.)

CHORUS

(Oh, how her face
Expresses her joy!
Oh, how it expresses
The eagerness of her soul!)

FATIMA

Zaira, ed è pur vero?...

A parte vieni
De' miei contenti?

E fia ver che la mano
Tu porga a un musulmano?
Ed obbliar potesti,
Zaira, che nascesti
Figlia a un crociato?

Oh! tu che mi rammenti?
remind me?
E che! forse mi è noto
Chi son io, da chi nacqui?

Nerestano
Che teco, infanti ancora, in Cesarea
Fatto schiavo, a te ognor pur lo dicea.

Quel segno augusto...

Ah! taci...

De' crociati
Tu sposo al vincitor, ne diverrai

Zaira, and is it indeed true?...

ZAIRA

Do you come
To share my happiness?

FATIMA
in a whisper

And can it be true that you give
Your hand to a Muslim?
Have you, Zaira, been able to forget
That you were born
The daughter of a crusader?

ZAIRA

Oh! Fatima, of what would you

Come now! Have I any idea
Who I am, and who was my father?

FATIMA

And yet Nerestano,
Who was enslaved with you in Cesarea
When you were both still infants, always
told you it was so.
That noble sign...

ZAIRA

Ah! be silent...

FATIMA

If you wed
The crusaders' conqueror, you then

Poi la nemica.

Become their enemy.

ZAIRA

Ah! mai. La protettrice,
L'amica ognora io ne sarò. E' il mio sposo
D'alto cor, generoso...
Eccolo.

Ah! never. I shall always be
Their friend and protector. My husband
Is noble of heart, and generous...
Here he is...

(As she is about to go to meet Orosmane, she is checked by a glance from Fatima, who withdraws with the slaves.)

SCENE VI

Orosmane and Zaira.

OROSMANE

A che raffreni
Quell'impulso d'amore
Cher ver me ti spingea? Qui sul mio core
E' il tuo trono.

Why do you suppress
That impulse of love
Which urged you towards me? Your throne
Is here upon my heart.

ZAIRA

indicating her own heart

E qui è l'ara
Dove, adorato, imperi.

And here is the altar
Where you, my adored, hold sway.

OROSMANE

Amami, o cara,
Come t'ama Orosman.

Love me, my dear,
As Orosman loves you.

ZAIRA

Puoi dubitarne?
D'innalzarmi al tuo spoglio

Can you doubt it?
Your deigning to raise me to your throne

Ti degni, e di tua destra
Il prezioso dono,
Fan che riconoscente l'alma mia...

Ah! la più dolce e grata
Speranza io perderei,
Se tu mi amassi sol pe' doni miei.

D'immenso amore io t'amo:
Vo' immenso amor da te.

Felice io non mi chiamo,
Se tu nol sei con me.

Di quel che io provo in petto
Non v'è più vivo ardor.

Un più soave affetto
Chi mai provò finor?

Ah! quello sguardo intendo,
Quel tuo sospir comprendo,
Con me tu senti l'estasi
Che mi rapisce il cor.

And the precious gift
Of your hand in marriage
Mean that my soul in gratitude...

OROSMANE

Ah! but I should lose
My sweetest and most cherished hope
Were you to love me for my gifts alone.

I love you with a boundless love:
I wish a boundless love from you.

ZAIRA

I do not call myself happy,
If you are not happy with me.

OROSMANE

There is no more lively flame of love
Than that which I feel in my breast.

ZAIRA

Has anyone ever hitherto
Felt a more sweet passion?

TOGETHER

Ah! I can read that glance,
I understand your sigh,
With me you feel the ecstasy
That takes possession of my heart.

SCENE VII

Orosmane and Zaira are joined by Nerestano. Corasmino, who introduces Nerestano, promptly retires.

NERESTANO

lingering in the background

(Ciel! che miro?... E fia vero?)

(Heavens! what do I see?... Can it be true?)

ZAIRA

(Nerestano!... ah! ch'io tremo.)

(Nerestano!... ah! how I tremble.)

OROSMANE

(Ecco l'altero.)

(Here's the proud fellow.)

to Nerestano

T'avanza.

Approach.

to Zaira

Di quel Franco
Odi i voti, o Zaira;
Egli a guidarti su la Senna aspira.

O Zaira, hear the wishes
Of this Frenchman; he hopes to lead you
Back to the banks of the Seine.

NERESTANO

E' vero: un Re t'attende,
E la fè in cui nascesti.
I tuoi voti fur questi; e, lode al cielo,

It is true: a King awaits you,
And the faith in which you were born.
You vowed to return; and, praised be
Heaven,

Io compirli potei.

I have been able to bring your vows to
fruition.

ZAIRA

Ma i di cangiaro,

But times have changed,

Ed altro voto io già formai più caro.
vow.

(Oh mia Zaira!)

Come!
In obbligo poni il cielo?
Ah! pensa... hai tempo ancora...

Non più. La nuova aurora
Qui più non ti riveda.

Andiam.

Ti seguo.

Ah! più sperar non lice.
Solo il Cielo salvar può l'infelice.

And I have now formed another, dearer

OROSMANE

(O my Zaira!)

NERESTANO

What!

Can you cast Heaven from your mind?
Ah! think... you still have time...

OROSMANE

to Nerestano

Enough! Let not the new dawn
See you still here.

to Zaira

Let us go.

ZAIRA

I follow you.

(They leave.)

NERESTANO

Ah! There's no longer room for hope.
Heaven alone can save the unhappy
creature.

(*He departs.*)

SCENE VIII

A subterranean chamber leading to the cells where the slaves are incarcerated.

Castiglione, then Nerestano.

CASTIGLIONE

Oh inaspettata sorte!
Alfin dopo tanti anni
Della Senna le sponde
Ci fia dato il veder!... T'inoltra,
o prode
Nostro liberator. L'albergo è questo
Del lutto e del dolor: qui gl'infelici

Di Solima campioni han da tre lustri

Carcere orrendo. Oh con qual gioia,
amico,
Benediran, redenti, il tuo gran zelo!
are ransomed.

Oh unexpected destiny!
At last after so many years
It will be given to us to see again
The banks of Seine!... Advance, brave
hero – You who
Have liberated us. This is the realm
Of mourning and grief: here for fifteen
years
The unhappy champions of Solima have
endured
Horrendous captivity. How joyfully,
my friend,
Will they bless your great zeal when they

NERESTANO

“Al Ciel sia lode, al Cielo

“Chè a me concede, cavalier oscuro,
“Grazia ottener presso al Sultan severo,

“Let your praise be to Heaven - to the
Heaven
“That has allowed me, an unknown knight,
“To elicit pardon from the severe Sultan,

“Tanti prodi far salvi, e te primiero.”

Così pietoso avesse ogni mia speme

Udita il Cielo! ma dolcezza umana
Sempre di amaro à sparsa.

E qual potresti
Voto formar, che accetto al Ciel non sia?
Qual t’affligge pensier?

Noto ti fia.
Non sia la gioia.

Calpestio d’armati
Vicin risuona... de’ guerrier’ disciolti
Vien condotto il drappello a te dinnante.
Godi dell’opra tua.

Beato istante!

SCENE IX

Castiglione and Nerestano are joined by a chorus of prisoners.

Chi ci toglie a’ ceppi nostri?

“To secure the safety of so many heroes
– yours first and foremost.”

Would that Heaven had heard all my
prayers

So mercifully! but human happiness is
Always mixed with bitterness.

CASTIGLIONE

But what wish could you conceive that
May not be acceptable to Heaven?
What is the thought that afflicts you?

NERESTANO

It shall be known to you.
But it will bring you no joy.

CASTIGLIONE

A trampling of armed men
Sounds close at hand... the company
Of released knights comes before you.
Rejoice to see what you have achieved.

NERESTANO

Blessed moment!

CHORUS

Who is it that releases us from our fetters?

Chi ci rende all'alma luce?
Tu?... sì, tu che in volto mostri
La pietà che ti conduce.
Oh contento! ecco, ecco impressa
Sul tuo sen l'insegna istessa,
Che in più lieta età felice
Ne guidava a trionfar.

Sì, compagni, ancor vi lice

Di brandir per lei l'acciar.

Ma un eroe con te non guidi?
Non ti segue Lusignano?

A lui solo i patry lidi
Nega barbaro il Sultano.

Cielo! e noi, quand'ei non viene,

Scioglierem da queste arene?
Quand'ei serba i lacci suoi
Voleremo a libertà?
Ah! giammai; ciascun di noi
Dov'ei muor, morir saprà.

Who restores us to the kindly light?
You?... yes, you, whose face reveals
The compassion that has led you here.
Oh happiness! here, here sewn upon
Your chest is the selfsame symbol
That in more joyous times
Guided us happily to victory.

NERESTANO

Yes, my companions, once more it is
granted you
To wield the sword for this symbol.

CHORUS

But do you not bring a hero with you?
Does Lusignano not follow you?

NERESTANO

To him alone the barbarous Sultan
Denies his ancestral shores.

CHORUS & CASTIGLIONE

Heavens! and we - if he does not come,
too,
Shall we depart from these shores?
When he is kept in fetters here,
Shall we wing our way to liberty?
Ah! never; one and all we shall know
How to die where he dies.

NERESTANO

Generosi! Il vostro amore
Lui non salva, e a voi dà morte.

You are generous! But your love saves
Him not: it only brings you death.

CHORUS & CASTIGLIONE

La sfidiam con fermo core;
Dell'eroe seguiam la sorte.
Giuramento ognun ne fea
Sul Giordano in Cesarea
Presso il santo monumento,
Ove il Re de' Re posò.
Scritto in sangue è il giuramento:
Niun di noi tradir lo può.

We defy death with unflinching hearts;
Let us share our hero's fate.
Each of us swore to follow him
To Jordan's banks in Cesarea,
Hard by the holy monument
Where the King of Kings is laid.
Inscribed in blood is the oath:
Not one of us can break it.

(They are about to retire.)

SCENE X

They are joined by Zaira; then Lusignano, supported by two slaves.

ZAIRA

Fermatevi...

Stop...

NERESTANO, CASTIGLIONE & CHORUS

Zaira!

Zaira!

ZAIRA

A' prieghi miei
Lusignan Orosmane vi ha concesso:
Ei mi segue; mirate.

At my prayers
Orosmane has granted you Lusignano:
He follows me: behold him.

ALL

Oh gioia! è desso.

O joy! it is he.

LUSIGNANO

Dove son io? Reggete
L'infermo fianco... a lunga notte avvezzi
Mal resiston questi occhi ai rai del
giorno.

Where am I? Support
My feeble limbs... my eyes, accustomed
To protracted night, ill can brook the
light of day.

NERESTANO

Fa' cor. A te d'intorno
Vedi i compagni di tua gloria antica...

Take courage. Here about you see
The companions of your former glory...

ZAIRA

Pianger di gioia, che degnati il Cielo
Gli abbia al contento di vederti illeso.

See them weep for joy, that Heaven has
Granted them the happiness of seeing you
safe.

LUSIGNANO

E fia ver ch'io vi trovi? e a voi fia
reso?
O preziosi avanzi
Degli eroi di Soria! martiri illustri
Della verace fede! a chi di tanto
Debitori siam noi?...

And is it true that I see you again? -
that I am restored to you?
O priceless survivors of the
Heroes of Soria! illustrious martyrs
Of the true faith! Who is it we are
Indebted to for this?

CASTIGLIONE

Gli hai presenti, o signor.

They are here before you, my lord.

ALL

indicating Nerestano and Zaira

Mirali.

Behold them.

LUSIGNANO

Voi! Voi!
Bontà celeste! E' quel che invan tentaro
Cento eserciti e cento, hai tu concesso

You! You!
Merciful Heaven! That which a hundred
and again
A hundred armies sought in vain, you

A sì giovani destre!... Ah! v'appressate
Ch'io vi contempi...
Ah dolci aspetti! Oh quante
Rimembranze in me destate!

have granted
To such young arms! Ah! approach
That I may look at you...
O sweet faces! Oh, how many
Memories you awaken in me!

ZAIRA & NERESTANO

(Mi balza il cor.)

(How my heart beats!)

Chi siete voi? Parlate.

LUSIGNANO

Who are you? Tell me.

Nerestano io m'appello. In Cesarea
Fatto schiavo fanciullo, e per favore
Del Re Luigi a servitù fuggito,
In corte accolto io fui; ma de' parenti
Il nome ignoro, e nol saprò giammai.

NERESTANO

My name is Nerestano. I was enslaved
In Cesarea when a boy; then, freed from
Bondage through King Louis' favour,
I was received at his court; but I know
Not my parents' name, nor ever shall.

LUSIGNANO

Misero!

Poor lad!

to Zaira

E tu?...

And you?...

ZAIRA

Provai
L'istessa sorte anch'io nel dì fatale
Che Cesarea da Noradin fu vinta.

I, too, suffered

The same fate upon the fatal day when
Cesarea was taken by Nouradin.

LUSIGNANO

Ah! fu quel dì la mia famiglia estinta.

Ah! that was the day when my family
became extinct.

Due figli sol... due figli
Avanzati alla strage... e schiavi

Two children alone... two children
Survived the carnage... perhaps they,

anch'essi
Rimaser forse... ambo sul fior degli anni
Sarian così... così gentili, e umani

Agli atti, alla favella ed all'aspetto.

(Cielo!)

Ma qual dal petto
Monil ti pende? Onde l'avesti?

Io l'ebbi...
Fin dalle fasce.

A me lo porgi... Oh vista!
E' desso!... è desso!...

Ah! che di' tu? Qual pianto
Negli occhi tuoi vegg'io?

Non tradir la mia speme, eterno Iddio!
L'età conforme... il loco...
Il sembante...

Ah! tu pur... dimmi: nel seno
Di una ferita hai tu la cicatrice?

E' vero.

too, ended up
As slaves... if so, both would now be in
The flower of their years like you...
equally well-bred, and courteous
In deed, speech and appearance.

ZAIRA

(Heavens!)

LUSIGNANO

But what pendant is that hanging
Upon your breast? How came you by it?

ZAIRA

I have had it

Since I was a baby.

LUSIGNANO

Give it to me... O, what do I see!
It is the same!... the same!...

ZAIRA

Ah! what are you saying? What tears
Are these that I see in your eyes?

LUSIGNANO

Heavenly Father! do not disappoint me!
The age is right... the place...
Her appearance...

to Nerestano

Ah! you, too... tell me: upon your chest
Do you bear the scar of a wound?

NERESTANO

Truly I do.

LUSIGNANO

Oh me felice!
Oh ineffabil dolcezza! Io li ritrovo,
Io riveggo i miei figli!

Oh, happy that I am!
O joy beyond words! I find them again,
I see my children once more!

ZAIRA & NERESTANO

Oh dio, che sento!

O God, what do I hear!

LUSIGNANO

Abbracciatemi... O figli!

Embrace me... My children!

ZAIRA & NERESTANO

O padre!

O father!

ALL

O lieto evento!

O happy event!

[5]

LUSIGNANO

Cari oggetti, in seno a voi
Io rinasco a nuova vita!

My dear children, in your embrace
I am born again to new life!

ZAIRA & NERESTANO

Ne' paterni amplessi tuoi
L'alma mia si sta rapita.

In your fatherly embrace
My soul is carried away.

LUSIGNANO

“Voi riveggo in pria ch'io muoja!...”

“I see you again before I die!...”

ZAIRA & NERESTANO

“Fu concesso al nostro amor.”

“It has been granted to our love.”

ALL THREE TOGETHER

Ah! cancella un dì di gioja
Mille giorni di dolor.

Ah! a day of joy
Cancels out a thousand days of grief.

LUSIGNANO

becoming aware of Zaira's attire



Garry Magee

Ma che miro! qual mi coglie
Rio timor, crudel sospetto!

(Ciel!)

Germana!

Oh rio timor!

Favella!

(Oimè!)

In franche spoglie
Te ben veggio, o mio diletto.
Ma costei perchè di questa
Vien coperta odiata vesta?
Parla...perchè?... Impallidisci!
Piangi... Intendo... Oh mio rossor!

Ah! nol celo: me punisci;
Musulmana io fui finor.

Mi sostieni... a tal favella
Senza te sarei spirato.

But what do I see! What evil fear,
What cruel suspicion seizes upon me!

ZAIRA

(Heavens!)

NERESTANO

Sister!

LUSIGNANO

Oh evil fear!

NERESTANO

Speak!

ZAIRA

(Alas!)

LUSIGNANO

In Frankish clothes
I do indeed see you, my beloved son.
But she – why does she come dressed
In that odious garb?
Speak... tell me why... You grow pale!
You weep... I understand... Oh my shame!

ZAIRA

Ah! I make no secret of it: punish me:
Hitherto I have been a Muslim.

LUSIGNANO

to Nerestano

Support me... without you
I should have died at such words.

NERESTANO

Majella Cullagh



“L’odi... Ah! l’odi, o mia sorella,
“Il suo core hai tu spezzato.

“Ciel!

“Potei soffrir tanti anni
“Pene orrende, atroci affanni;

“Ma tal macchia al sangue mio
“Io non posso tollerar.

“(Io mi sento il cor mancar!”)

[6]

LUSIGNANO

Qui, crudele! in queste arene
Del tuo Dio fu sparso il sangue.
Qui spirar miei figli in guerra,
Qui tua madre io vidi esangue;
E tu puoi parenti e Dio
Rinnegar, tradir così?
Morto io fossi, ah! morto anch’io
Se dovea mirar tal dì.

“In tempo ancora
“La ritrovi per salvarla.
“Già di figlia, già di suora
“La pietade in sen le parla.”

Deh! ti calma, padre mio,

“Hear him... Ah! my sister, hear him,
“You have broken his heart.

ZAIRA

“Heavens!

LUSIGNANO

“I have been able to endure horrendous
“Sufferings, atrocious torments for many
years;
“But I cannot suffer
“Such a stain upon my blood.

ZAIRA & NERESTANO

“(I feel my heart expiring!)”

Here, cruel daughter! the blood
Of your God was shed upon these sands.
Here my sons perished in battle,
Here I saw your mother robbed of life;
Yet you are able so to disown, to betray
Both your family and your God?
Would that I – I too – had died
Before I was destined to see such a day.

NERESTANO

“You find her again
“Still in time to save her. Already
“The duty of a daughter and sister
“Speaks to her in her breast.”

ZAIRA

Ah! be calm, father,

Deh! perdona. Io qui vivea
A me stessa ignota e oscura,
Nè parente mi reggea;
M'eran patria queste mura;
L'intelletto ed il cor mio
Nel seraglio si smarrì .
Ah! morir omai desio,

Se son rea, s'errai così.

Nel suo pianto appien vegg'io
Che il rimorso il cor sentì.
(Non lasciar, clemente Iddio,
L'alma sua perir così.)

Qui tua madre io vidi esangue;
E tu puoi parenti e Dio
Rinnegar, tradir così?
Morto io fossi, ah! morto anch'io
Se dovea mirar tal dì.

A che stai? Perdono implora,
Di lui degna omai ti mostra.

Che far deggio?

Pray forgive me. I lived here
In obscurity, unknown to myself,
Without any parent to support me;
These walls were my homeland;
My mind and my heart
Lost their way in the seraglio.
Ah! but I wish now to die, if I am
guilty,
If I erred in acting as I did.

NERESTANO

In her tears I see every sign
That she feels remorse in her heart.
(Merciful Heaven, do not allow
His soul to perish in this way.)

LUSIGNANO

Here I saw your mother robbed of life;
Yet you are able so to disown, to betray
Both your family and your God?
Would that I – I too – had died
Before I was destined to see such a day.

NERESTANO

to Zaira

Why do you wait? Implore his pardon,
Show that now you are worthy of him.

ZAIRA

What must I do?

LUSIGNANO

E il chiedi ancora?
Confessar la legge nostra.

Padre, imponi.

Un solo accento:
Sei cristiana?

Il giuro a te.

Zaira!

Ciel, ricevi il giuramento!

SCENE XI

Corasmino enters, with several soldiers.

Zaira!
Il sultan ti chiama a sè.

Ciel! che sento?

Tu dei
Separarti da costoro.

And can you still ask?
Acknowledge our law.

ZAIRA

Father, command me.

LUSIGNANO

A single word:
Are you a Christian?

ZAIRA

I swear to you I shall be.

CHORUS

from off-stage
Zaira!

NERESTANO

Heaven, hear her oath!

CORASMINO & CHORUS

Zaira!
The Sultan is calling for you.

ZAIRA

Heavens! what do I hear?

CORASMINO

You must

Quit the company of these people.
to the prisoners

Garry Magee
and
Majella Cullagh



Voi seguite i passi miei,
Custodirvi io deggio ancor.

As for you, follow me,
I must still keep you under guard.

CHORUS OF CHRISTIANS

Giusto ciel! Ciel pietoso!

Just heaven! Merciful heaven!

ZAIRA & NERESTANO

Ahi! qual colpo! quale orror!

Alas! what a blow! what horror!

LUSIGNANO

to the prisoners

Obbediam... coraggio, amici;
Di costanza il petto armate.

Let us obey... take courage, friends;
Arm your hearts with fortitude.

to Zaira & Nerestano

“Voi vivete ai dì felici,
“E il segreto ognor serbate.”

“You, live on to happy days, and keep
“Your secret ever to yourselves.”

ZAIRA & NERESTANO

Lo giuriamo.

We swear it.

LUSIGNANO

Or basta. Addio.

Now enough. Farewell.

NERESTANO & ZAIRA

Oh dolor!

O grief!

CHORUS

“Addio crudel!”

“Cruel farewell!”

ZAIRA, NERESTANO & LUSIGNANO

Non si pianga, si nasconda
Il dolor che il sen c'innonda.
Questo addio non fia l'estremo:
Ci vedremo - almeno in Ciel.

Let us not weep, let us conceal
The grief that fills our breasts.
May this farewell be not the last:
We shall see each other again – at least
in Heaven.

(All depart.)

SCENE XII

A magnificent atrium, as in Scene Four.

Orosmane, Corasmino and guards.

OROSMANE

to Corasmino

Liberi tornin tutti. Era il sospetto
Figlio del tuo timor. L'oste de' Franchi
La Soria non minaccia, essa è rivolta
Contro il Sultan d'Egitto; e mio nemico

Let all be set free again. My suspicion
Was born of your fear. The French host
Does not threaten Syria: their offensive
Is directed against the Sultan of Egypt;
and I detest

Più che Luigi quel Sultan detesto.

That Sultan more than Louis as my enemy.

CORASMINO

Nel tuo voler funesto
Tropo fermo sei tu, perch'io pur voglia
Porti d'innanzi il ver. Piaccia al
Profeta

You are too set upon your fatal wish,
For me to want to place the truth
Before you. May it please the Prophet

Che non ti sia fatal la libertade
Che a Lusignano tu dai!

That the liberty you grant Lusignano
Should not prove fatal to you!

OROSMANE

“Presso alla tomba è l'egro veglio omai.

“By now the weak old man is close to
the tomb.

“Dimentica di lui

“Europe has lost sight of him

“Già da molt’anni, e delle sue sventure
“Non curante è l’Europa.

“For many years, and cares nothing
“For his misfortunes.

CORASMINO

“A rovesciarla
“Bastò sull’Asia di romito oscuro
“La nuda voce. Che farà l’aspetto
“Di un Re soffrente e oppresso?...

“To pour all Europe
“Upon Asia it needed only the voice of
“An obscure hermit. What may not the
“Sight of a suffering and oppressed King
do?...

OROSMANE

“Specchio all’Europa, e insiem terror fia
d’esso.
“Ma sia qual vuoi. ” Il diedi, e tu
lo sai,
Ai preghi di Zaira, ed io non uso
Di ripigliar miei doni... Ella pur brama
A Nerestan dar l’ultimo congedo.

“Let Europe see her own fate mirrored
in him, and be seized with terror.
“But be that as it may.” I surrendered
him, as you well know,
To the prayers of Zaira, and I am not
accustomed
To take back gifts once given..
She wishes,
Too, to bid Nerestano a last goodbye.

CORASMINO

Che sento! E tu, signor!...

What do I hear! And you, my lord!...

OROSMANE

Io lo concedo.

I grant her her wish.

CORASMINO

E a tanto giungi?

Do you stretch things so far?

OROSMANE

Io dell’Herem le leggi
Tutte infrango, lo so; ma di un rifiuto

I break all the laws
Of the Harem, I know; but I cannot
distress

Affligger lei non posso, e me crudele
A quel tenero cor tu invan vorresti.
SCENE XII

Her with a refusal: in vain you wish
Me cruel towards that tender heart.

Orosmane and Corasmino are joined by Apeled.

Signor, come imponesti,
Mi segue Nerestan.

APELED

My Lord, as you ordered,
Nerestan follows me.

OROSMANE

to the guards

Venga Zaira.

Let Zaira be brought hither.

to Corasmino

E tu mi segui. Alcun non fia che ardisca,
Molesto spettator offrirsi a loro.

And you, come with me. Let no one dare
Intrude, an untimely spectator, upon
them.

Questa è mia legge.

This is my command.

CORASMINO

(Il mio furor divoro.)

(I swallow my anger.)

(They depart.)

SCENE XIV

Apeled and Nerestano; then Zaira.

Qui rimaner tu puoi.
Tarda non fia Zaira.

APELED

You may wait here.
Zaira will not be long.

(He leaves.)

NERESTANO

Oh in quale stato
In qual luogo degg'io sì caro pegno
Abbandonar per sempre! Oh mia Zaira!

Sarai tu al padre ed al tuo Dio rubella?...
Alcun s'appressa.

Nerestan!

Sorella!
Ti abbraccio ancor... Ci unisce
Un'altra volta il Ciel; ma il padre...
Ahi lasso!
Fia tolto al nostro amore
Forse per sempre.

Ah! che mai dici?

Ei muore.
A tanti affetti e tanti
Quel core non bastò; misero! incerto
Della tua fede, amaramente ei geme;

Oh in what state of mind, in what

A place must I forever leave a person
So dear, and entrusted to me! O my
Zaira!

Will you prove a rebel to both your
father and your God?...
But someone comes.

Nerestan!

ZAIRA

NERESTANO

Sister!
I embrace you again... Once more Heaven
Unites us; but our father... Alas! poor
man!
It may be that he is torn from our love
For all time.

ZAIRA

Ah! whatever are you saying?

NERESTANO

He is dying.
His heart was not proof against so many
Distressing emotions; wretched man! in
Doubt about your faith, he groans most

Grave gli è morte.

E me spergiura ei teme?
No, nol son'io, nol sono...
Ed è mia legge?

Detestar l'impero
De' tuoi tiranni.

Ed Orosmane?

Odiarlo,
Abborrirlo dei tu...

Pietoso, umane,
Generoso è il Sultano,
Mi benefica... mi ama...

E tu?...

Mia destra,
Sol la mia destra ei chiede.

E tu?... prosegui...

Egli ha mia fè...

grievously;
Death hangs heavily over him.

ZAIRA

And does he fear me false to my word?
No, I am not, I am not...
And what must I do?

NERESTANO

Detest the sway of those
Who stand tyrant over you.

ZAIRA

And Orosmane?

NERESTANO

Hate him,
You must abhor him...

ZAIRA

Compassionate, humane,
Generous is the Sultan; he showers
Blessings upon me... he loves me...

NERESTANO

And you?...

ZAIRA

My hand,
It is only my hand he asks of me.

NERESTANO

And you?... continue...

ZAIRA

I have pledged him my faith...

NERESTANO

Tua fede!
Oh qual vibrasti orribile
Colpo al mio cor, Zaira!
Ahi! con qual fronte riedere
Al genitor che spira?
Che dirgli allor che il misero
Mi chiederà di te?...
Empia! al mio sguardo involati,
Più non offrirti a me.

Deh! non fuggirmi; svenami;
Se pur son rea cotanto...
Sola, inesperta e debole,
Cessi a possente incanto:
Un nume in mezzo agli uomini
A me il Sultan sembrò.
Ah! quest'incanto struggere
La mia ragion non può.

Virtù lo puote: ascoltala,
Ella ti parla al core.

Pietà di me, compiangimi:
Amo, e ne sento orror.

Sì, lo scompiglio orrendo
Dell'alma tua comprendo;

Your faith!
Oh what a hideous blow
You deal my heart, Zaira!
Alas! with what cheer must I return
To a dying father?
What shall I say to him when,
Poor man, he asks me of you?...
Evil woman, fly from my sight,
Venture no more before me.

ZAIRA

Ah! do not fly me; spill my blood
If I am as guilty as you suggest...
Alone, frail and inexperienced,
I yielded to powerful enchantment:
The Sultan seemed to me
A god among men.
Ah! my reason is not capable
Of breaking this enchantment.

NERESTANO

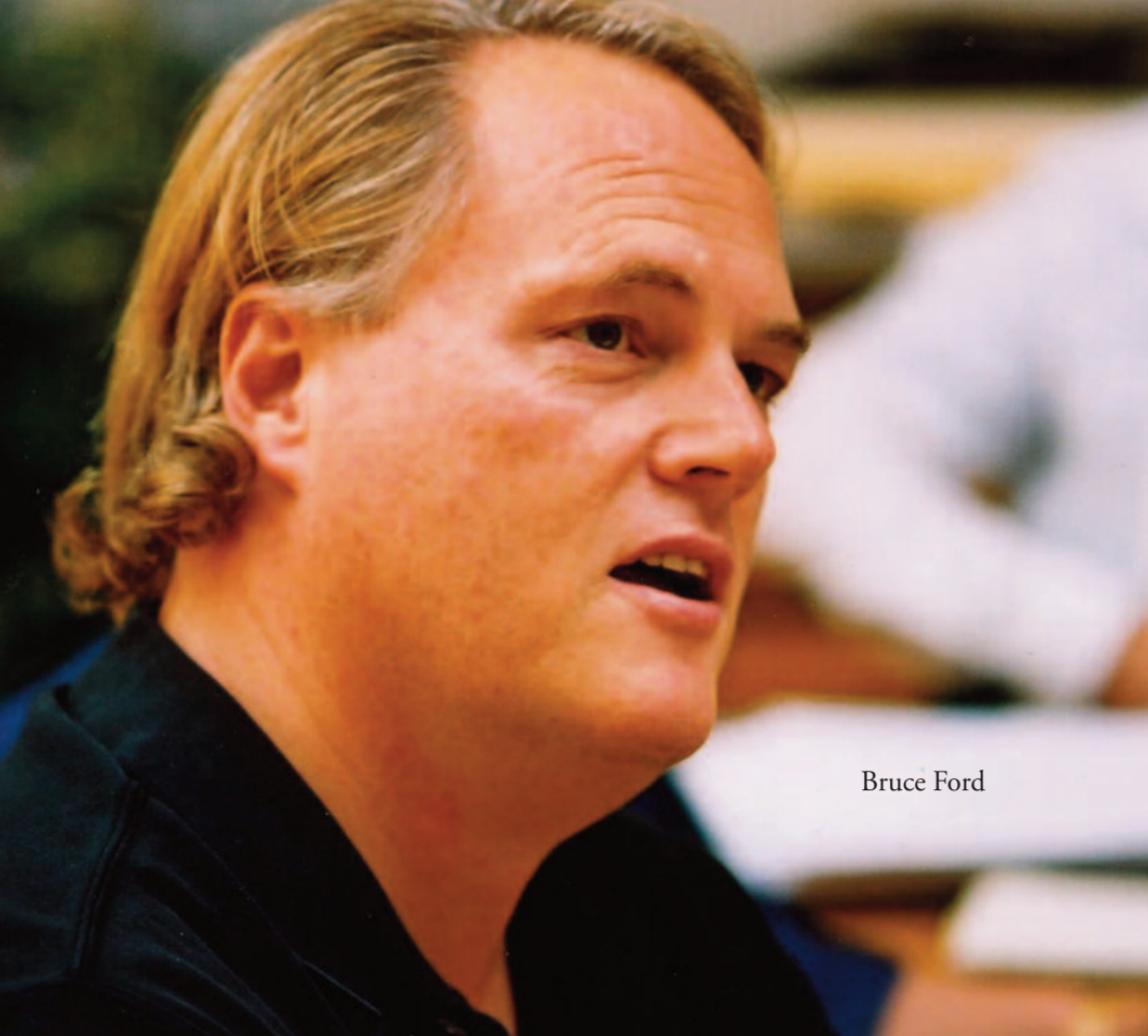
Virtue can free you: hear her voice,
She speaks to your heart.

ZAIRA

Have mercy on me, have pity on me:
I love, yet that love fills me with
horror.

NERESTANO

Yes, I understand the terrible
Turmoil of your soul; you still



Bruce Ford

Al ciel resisti ancora,
Ma il ciel vittoria avrà.

Oh mio fratello!

Ah suora!

Speme per me non v'ha!

[8]

Segui, deh! segui a piangere
Nelle fraterne braccia.
Basta il tuo pianto a tergere
D'ogni fallir la traccia.
Odi del cor il grido
Che ti richiama al ciel.
Torna colomba al nido,
Ah! torna al tuo Dio fedel.

Stringimi ancora, stringimi
Fra le fraterne braccia,
L'ombre che mi circondano
Lungi da me discaccia.
Sciogli la benda oscura
Che mi contende il ciel.
Torno innocente e pura,
Ah! torno al mio Dio fedel.

Try to hold out against Heaven,
Yet Heaven will have the victory.

ZAIRA

throwing herself into his arms

Ah, my brother!

NERESTANO

Ah, sister!

ZAIRA

There is no hope for me!

NERESTANO

Weep, yes, let your tears flow
Here in your brother's arms.
Your tears will suffice to wipe away
All trace of your faults.
Listen to the cry of your heart
That calls you back to Heaven.
Return, a dove to the nest;
Ah! return, faithful, to your God.

ZAIRA

Hold me still, hold me
Within your brotherly arms;
And drive far from me
The shades that surround me.
Tear off the dark blindfold
That contends with Heaven for me.
I return, innocent and pure,
Ah! I return, faithful, to my God.

(Joyful music is heard, causing Zaira to start.)

Ah! qual suono?

Ah! but what sound is that?

NERESTANO

Alcun s'apressa.

Someone comes.

ZAIRA

Il Sultan!

The Sultan!

NERESTANO

Sorella, ardir.

Courage, sister.

SCENE XV

The curtain in the background is raised, giving a view of the Mosque prepared for the marriage of Orosmane and Zaira.

Orosmane appears, preceded by his officers, accompanied by Corasmino, and followed by guards. Fatima and her companions also appear.

CHORUS

Pronto è il rito; ognun t'aspetta.

All's ready for the rite; everyone
awaits you.

Vieni all'ara, o donna eletta.

Come to the altar, chosen lady.

Quest'istante te beata

At one and the same time this moment

Noi felici a un tempo fa.

Blesses you and makes us happy.

Sei più cara dell'aurora,

You are dearer than the dawn,

Sei più dolce dell'amore,

You are sweeter than love,

E riposta nel tuo core

And the hope of every heart

D'ogni cor la speme sta.

Is fixed upon your heart.

OROSMANE

Corsa è l'ora a lei concessa.

Cavalier, tu puoi partir.

Tu mi segui, Zaira,
Già l'altar ne infiora amor.

(Lassa me!)

(Che fia? sospira!...)
Non rispondi?

Ah! mio signor!

Che mai veggio? In tal momento
Tu sì mesta e sbigottita!
Parla. Perchè?

Un tristo evento
Di dolore l'ha colpita...
Lusignan, signor, sen muore;
Chi di noi potria gioir?

Deh! ti piaccia a di migliore
Queste nozze differir.

Differirle!... e qual pensiero
D'uom morente aver tu puoi?

The hour's grace granted her is past.

to Nerestano

Sir Knight, you may take your leave.

to Zaira

And you, Zaira, follow me: Love already
Decks the altar with flowers for us.

ZAIRA

(Unhappy me!)

OROSMANE

(What's this? she sighs!...)

Have you no reply?

ZAIRA

Ah! my lord!

OROSMANE

Whatever do I behold? In such a moment
So doleful and cast down!
Speak. Tell me why.

NERESTANO

A sorrowful event
Has brought her grief...
Lusignano, my lord, is dying;
Who amongst us could rejoice?

ZAIRA

Ah! may it please you to postpone
This wedding to a happier day.

OROSMANE

Postpone it!... and what concern
Can you have for a dying man?

E' francese.

E a lei straniero.

Niun cristiano è tal per noi.

Tutti, o Franco, tutti il sono
Per colei ch'io pongo in trono.

Vieni omai.

Signor...

Ricusi!
L'amor mio tropp'oltre abusi.

Deh! soffri ch'io mi ritiri,
Ch'io t'asconda i miei sospiri.

Resta... il vo'... Tu forse, o Franco,
Sei tu forse un seduttore?
Guardie, olà!

T'arresta... io manco.

Ah Zaira! Oh ciel, che mai sarà?

NERESTANO

He is a Frenchman.

OROSMANE

And a stranger to her.

NERESTANO

No Christian counts as a stranger to us.

OROSMANE

All, bold Frank, all are strangers
To her I place upon my throne.

to Zaira

Come now.

ZAIRA

My lord...

OROSMANE

Do you refuse?
You presume too much upon my love.

ZAIRA

Ah! allow me to retire,
That I may hide my tears from you.

OROSMANE

Stay... I wish it... You, Frenchman,
Are you perchance a seducer?
Guards, ho there!

ZAIRA

Stop... I feel I am dying.

NERESTANO

Ah, Zaira! Heavens, what will happen?

(Oh mio furor!)
Ite, o schiavi, e differito
Sia per ora il sacro rito.

E tu trema; sul Giordano
Non ti trovi il nuovo albor.

Io saprò da qual deriva
Strana fonte il tuo dolore.
Sciagurato chi mi priva
Del mio bene, del tuo cor!
Fremerei d'aver negletta
Del Sultano la bontà.
Il furor di mia vendetta
L'universo scuoterà.

“Non cercar da qual deriva
“Fatal fonte il mio dolore.
“Niun mortal di te mi priva;
“Del destino è il rio tenore.”
Ma da me, da me negletta
Non pensar la tua bontà.
Più crudel di tua vendetta
Tal sospetto a me si fa.

(Dio de' padri, in lei ravviva

OROSMANE

(Oh, my fury!)
Go, slaves, and let the sacred rite
Be put off for the present.

to Nerestano

And you, tremble; let tomorrow's dawn
No longer find you upon Jordan's shore.

to Zaira

I shall discover from what strange cause
Springs your grief.
Woe betide the wretch who deprives me
Of my beloved, of your heart!
You will quake to have set at nought
The goodwill of the Sultan.
The rage of my vengeance
Will shake the universe.

ZAIRA

“Seek not to know from what fatal cause
“Springs my grief.
“No mortal man deprives you of me;
“It is the cruel course of destiny.”
But do not think that I set
Your goodwill at nought.
Such a suspicion is yet more cruel
For me than your vengeance.

NERESTANO

(God of my fathers, revive within her

Di tua fede il puro ardore.

L'empia fiamma che nutriva
Sia sepolta nel suo core.
Questa almeno in morte aspetta
Un eroe da te pietà,
Ah! l'amor, non la vendetta
Del Sultan tremar mi fa.)

(Ben vegg'io da qual deriva
Rea cagione il suo dolore.
Per lo schiavo amor nutriva,
Ingannava il suo signore.
Di sua gente, di sua setta
Tutta è in lei l'infedeltà.
Ma l'oltraggio avrà vendetta,
L'arte mia l'affretterà.)

(Tal ripulsa al suo signore!
Tal mercede a tanto amore!
Vile ancora, ancor negletta
Nel serraglio languirà.)

The pure and ardent desire for your
faith.

Let the wicked passion she nourished
Be buried within her heart.
This degree of pity, at least,
A hero looks for from you as he dies,
Ah! it is the Sultan's love, not
His vengeance that makes me tremble.)

CORASMINO

(Very clearly do I see the evil cause
From which her grief derives.
She nourished a love for the slave,
She was deceiving her lord.
All the faithlessness of her people
And of her sect is to be found in her.
But the outrage will be revenged,
My art will hasten its accomplishment.)

CHORUS

(Such a repulse offered to her lord!
Such thanks rendered for so much love!
Vile once more, once more neglected,
She will languish in the serraglio.)

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

SCENE I

An atrium, as in Act One

Zaira & Fatima

Fa' cor, Zaira. Il sacrificio è amaro,	FATIMA Take heart, Zaira. The sacrifice is bitter but necessary;
Ma necessario; e la pietà superna Ti reggerà, perchè compiuto ei sia.	And heaven's mercy will sustain you, That it may be accomplished.
	ZAIRA
Sì, la fralezza mia D'ajuto ha d'uopo che non sia terreno... A tanta guerra ogni valor vien meno.	Yes, my weakness has need Of more than earthly help... All courage fails before such conflict.
	FATIMA
Tu vincerai, mel credi; Vittoria è nel soffrir.	You will conquer, believe me; Victory comes through suffering.
	ZAIRA
Ahi vana speme! Invan dal cor che geme	Alas, empty hope! In vain a prayer arises from my groaning heart that
S'alza preghiera al ciel perch'ei ne tolga D'Orosmane l'immagine, e ad ogn'istante	Heaven should erase Orosmane's image From my breast, for at every instant I

Fra il cielo e me la cara immagine io vedo. see his dear image
Come between Heaven and me.

FATIMA

Misera! e credi... My poor friend! and can you believe...

ZAIRA

Il ciel clemente io credo. I believe that Heaven is merciful.
Odiar potrebbe tanto Could it so hate
Un magnanimo cor? Qual può cristiano Such a generous heart? What Christian
Vantar virtude che il Sultan non vanti? Can boast a virtue that the Sultan
boasts not?

Sorge talor, fra tanti There sometimes arises, amid so many
Crudi pensier, consolatrice idea, Cruel thoughts, the consoling idea
Che dove io salga di Sionne al trono, That, where I mount the throne of Sion,
Alla salute sua prescelta io sono. I have been chosen by destiny for his
protection.

Allor desio mi prende Then I am seized by a wish to fly to the
Di volar al Sultano, e a lui prostrarmi, Sultan, to prostrate myself before him,
E l'esser mio svelargli. And to reveal my identity to him.

FATIMA

Deh! nol tentar: perdi il fratel, se parli. Ah! do not attempt it: if you speak,
you will destroy your brother.

T'ama Orosmane, è vero; Orosmane loves you, it is true;
Ma più i cristiani abborre, e, più di But he hates the Christians even more,
tutti, and, most of all,

Di Lusignan la stirpe. Ah! serba, amica, Lusignano's line. Ah! my friend, keep
Serba al padre il segreto e la promessa. Your secret and your promise to your
father.

ZAIRA

Odo rumor... Cielo! il Sultano
s'appressa.
SCENE II

I hear sounds... Heavens! the Sultan
comes.

They are joined by Orosmane.

(At a gesture from Orosmane, Fatima retires.)

OROSMANE

Che a te mi guidi amore,
Zaira, non pensar. Passò quel giorno
Che te dell'amor mio degna credei.
Nè paventar tu dei
Che a' rimproveri io scenda, e ch'io
t'astringa
Con mendaci discolpe a lusingarmi:
Tropo altero son io per lamentarmi.

Zaira, do not think it is love that
Brings me to you. The day has passed
When I believed you worthy of my love.
But you must not fear, either,
That I should stoop to reproaches, and
force you
To deceive me with false excuses:
I am too proud to voice my sorrows.

ZAIRA

(Oh rie parole! Oh sensi
Che mi spezzano il cor!)

(Oh cruel words! Oh sentiments
That break my heart!)

OROSMANE

Ma generoso
Del par che altero io son; nè finger teco
Voglio per ciò. Quant'io t'amai, ti
sprezzo,
E i dì perduti in amar te detesto.

But I am as generous
As I am proud; and hence I have no wish
To deceive you. Just as much as I once
loved you, so I now despise you,
And resent the days I lost in
loving you.

ZAIRA



Alastair Miles

(Da lui sprezzata!... Ah! questo
Avanza ogni martir.)

Al basso stato
Dond'io ti tolsi, or riedi, e schiava
abbietta
Nel fondo dell'Harem languì negletta.

[9]

Io troverò nell'Asia
Donna a cui dare un trono,
Che più di te lo meriti,
Che più ne apprezzi il dono,
Che al par di te non cangi
Gli affetti suoi così...

(Misera me!)

Tu piangi!
Zaira? Tu piangi...

Ah! sì,
Piango, misera!
Piango; ma, deh! non credere,
Lassa! ch'io pianga un trono:
Piango quel cor magnanimo,
Che mel recava in dono;
Piango, infelice, e bramo

(That he should despise me!... Ah! this
Exceeds all other anguish.)

OROSMANE

Now revert to the
Base status from which I raised you,
and, a degraded slave, languish
Neglected in the recesses of the harem.

Here in Asia I shall find
A woman to whom to present a throne –
A woman who deserves it more than you –
Who values the gift more than you,
And who does not change her affections
As glibly as you...

ZAIRA

(Woe is me!)

OROSMANE

You weep!
Zaira? You weep...

ZAIRA

Ah! yes,
I weep, unhappy me!
I weep; but do not think, wretched
Though I am, that I weep for a throne:
I weep for that generous heart
That brought it to me as a gift;
I weep, unhappy that I am, and wish

Del primo amor il dì.

Tu m'ami? Zaira!

Tu m'ami ancor?

S'io t'amo, o ciel!

Tu m'ami ancora?

Non fosse mai così!

Ah! Deh parla!
M'ami tu ancor?

O ciel!

Deh parla, Zaira.

O ciel!

[10]

Deh! se tu m'ami, o barbara,
Dimmi chi a me t'invola.
Basta un accento a rendere
La calma a questo cor.
Spargi il furor d'oblio:
Era delirio il mio;

to return

To the day when we were first in love.

OROSMANE

You love me? Zaira!

You love me still?

ZAIRA

Heavens, how I love you!

OROSMANE

You love me still?

ZAIRA

Would it were otherwise!

OROSMANE

Ah! Speak!

You love me still?

ZAIRA

O Heavens!

OROSMANE

Ah speak, Zaira.

ZAIRA

O Heavens!

OROSMANE

Ah! if you love me, cruel one,
Tell me who steals you from me.
A single word suffices to restore
Calm to this heart of mine. Draw
A veil of forgetfulness over my fury:
My anger was a madness;



Patric Schmid (producer)
and Majella Cullagh

Sola di me sei l'arbitra,
Sola t'adoro ancor.

Ah! per pietà, non chiedere
Quale tumulto ho in seno;
Io non lo posso esprimere
Se non col mio dolor.
Cessa, e i trasporti affrena;
Pena mi accresci a pena...
Moro se m'odii, ah! misera!
Moro se nutri amor.

E al mio pregar resistere
Ancor tu puoi, Zaira?
Forse un nemico, un perfido
Contro di me cospira?

Ah! tu temer non dei;
Per salvar te, morrei.
Ogni sventura è mia...
Non domandar di più.

Sventura!... Oh ciel! qual fia?...
Omai parlar tu dei.
Zaira, deh! parla omai.
[11]
Deh! questo dì concedimi,
Sol questo breve giorno;

You alone exert authority over me,
And you are still the only one I adore.

ZAIRA

Ah! for pity's sake, ask not
What tumult I have in my breast;
I am incapable of expressing it
Except by outward show of my grief.
Stop, and curb your transports; you add
But one suffering to another for me...
I die if you hate me, ah wretched me!
I die if you continue to love me.

OROSMANE

And can you still hold out
Against my prayers, Zaira?
Perhaps an enemy, a traitor
Conspires against me?

ZAIRA

Ah! you need not fear:
I should die, were it to save you.
Every misfortune is mine...
Ask me no more.

OROSMANE

Misfortune!... Heavens! what is this?...
Now it is imperative that you speak.
Zaira, ah! now speak.

ZAIRA

Alas! allow me this day,
Just this one short day;

Accorda a queste lagrime
Quest'ultimo favor.
Tutti del cor gli arcani
Chiari ti fian domani...
Vedrai, vedrai se merito
Da te disprezzo o amor.

Ah! per un cor che palpita
E' lungo spazio un giorno.
Non sai che triste immagini
Figura il mio pensier.
Pensa che s'io m'arrendo,
Fede da te pretendo;
Pensa che in odio orribile
Si cambia offeso amor.

SCENE III

Nerestano and Castiglione.

O Castiglione! o amico!
Io lo conobbi appena, appena accolto
Nelle sue braccia ei m'ebbe, a me fu
tolto.
Oh qual mortal fu mai con tanti affanni

Grant to these tears of mine
This last favour.
All the hidden secrets of my heart
Will be made clear to you tomorrow...
You will see, you will see whether it is
Scorn or love that I deserve from you.

OROSMANE

Ah! a day is a long stretch of time
For a heart that beats like mine.
You do not know what sad pictures
My thought conjures up in my mind.
Think that if I grant your request,
I demand that you keep faith with me;
Think that if you abuse my love
Love changes to horrible hatred.

(They depart.)

NERESTANO

O Castiglione! O my friend!
I scarcely knew him, he scarcely had
Gathered me in his arms before he was
taken from me.
Oh what other mortal in this world

Provato in terra! In morte ancora, in
morte
Era il suo cor trafitto, e gli occhi
erranti,
Pria di serrarsi al giorno,
Invan la figlia ricerà d'intorno.

Was ever subjected to like sufferings!
Even as he died, as he died,
His heart was pierced, and his wandering
eyes,
Before they closed to the light of day,
Sought round for his daughter in vain.

SCENE IV

They are joined by Apeled

APELED

to Nerestano

Allor che giunga all'Occidente il sole
Lungi il Sultan ti vuole.

Before the sun sinks in the west
The Sultan wishes you far from hence.

NERESTANO

“Zaira...”

“Zaira...”

APELED

Rivederla tenti invano;
Sposa al novello di “fia del Sultano”

In vain you try to see her again;
At tomorrow's dawn she will be a bride
“of the Sultan”.

(He leaves.)

SCENE V

Nerestano and Castiglione

NERESTANO

calling after Apeled

Odi... S'invola... ah perfida germana!

Hear me... He is gone... Ah! traitorous sister!

Tu sposa del Sultan? spergiura! infida!

You the Sultan's bride? Ah! faithless oath-breaker!

CASTIGLIONE

Ah! nol sarà, nol credere...

Ah! but it will not be, do not believe it..

NERESTANO

Pur troppo
Certa è la mia sciagura.

Alas,
My misfortune is certain.

Lungi da queste mura

Must I depart, then, far

Dunque andarne dovrò?... Vieni: si tenti

From these walls?... Come: let us try

D'inviarle quel foglio ch'io vergai:

To send her the letter I wrote:

Quest'è l'unica speme.

It is our only hope. Have pity,

Pietade, o sommo Dio, d'un cor che geme!

Mighty God, upon a groaning heart!

(They leave.)

SCENE VI

Orosmane and Apeled

OROSMANE

Altro non vuoi?

Do they seek for nothing else?

APELED

E' questo
L'unico prego ch'ogni Franco porge
Del morto vecchio a nome.

This is the only
Prayer that every Frenchman asks
In the name of the dead old man.

OROSMANE

Ebben, sia pago:
Obbligo d'ogn'ira è morte. Abbia
l'estinto
Colà sul monte la bramata tomba

Per man de' suoi; nè alcun sia tanto
ardito
Fra' musulmani di turbarne il rito.

Well then, let it be granted:
Death is a time to forget all anger.
Now that he is dead, let him have
His desired grave there upon
the mountain,
Dug by his followers; and let no Muslim
be so bold
As to disturb the ceremony.

(Apeled leaves.)

SCENE VII

Orosmane, then Corasmino and other Mohammedans.

OROSMANE

E tu saprai, Zaira,
Ch'io prevenni i tuoi voti, e a mia
pietade
Grata sarai. Tu nuovi affetti insegni,
Nuovi costumi a questo cor superbo.

Vinto quell'odio acerbo,
Che pe' Franchi io nutria, da ora innanzi
Mi fiano fratelli, chè a te son tali.

And you will know, Zaira,
That I anticipated your prayers, and you
will be grateful that I
Showed mercy. You teach my proud heart
New emotions, new ways of behaving.
Now
That I have overcome that bitter hatred
Which I harboured against the Franks,
They will henceforth be my brothers,
since they are brothers to you.

CORASMINO

Fratelli i Franchi! essi ti son fatali.

Brothers the French! They will bring you
to your death.

Che dici tu! qual deggio
Temer periglio?

OROSMANE

What say you! What danger should
I fear?

Il tradimento.

CORASMINO

Betrayal.

Come!

OROSMANE

What!

Chi tradirmi potria?

Who is there who could betray me?

CORASMINO

Chi più colmasti
De' beneficj tuoi, quei ti tradisce;
Chi più credi fedele, inganni ordisce.

She whom you most lavishly have
Heaped with favours, she betrays you;
She whom you believe most faithful, she
plots deceits.

OROSMANE

Oh qual mi desti in seno
Crudo sospetto!

Oh! what cruel suspicion
You awaken in my breast!

CORASMINO

M'odi.

Hear me.

Da' veglianti custodi

A vile slave, surprised by vigilant
guards

Presso l'Harem, sorpreso un vile schiavo,
All'infedel Zaira era d'un foglio
Apportator.

Near the Harem, was the bearer
Of a letter
To the faithless Zaira.

OROSMANE

Un foglio!... a lei!

A letter!... to her! Where is it?

Ov'è? chi lo vergò? cadde in tua mano? Who wrote it? Did it fall into your hands?

CORASMINO

Eccolo.

Here it is.

OROSMANE

after looking at it

Nerestan!

Nerestan!

CORASMINO

Yes, Nerestano.

Sì, Nerestano.

OROSMANE

reading

‘Cara Zaira! avvi segreta uscita
Vicino alla moschea, per cui, non vista,
Puoi tu recarti nel giardin deserto.

‘Dear Zaira, there is a secret door
Close to the mosque, by which, unseen,
You can find your way into the deserted
garden.

“Dalla notte coperto,”
Quivi io t’aspetto. Se venir ricusi,
Al nuovo raggio mi vedrai tu spento.’
Sogno o desto son’io!
Possibil fia!... Zaira!
Sì nera colpa... Ah! no, m’inganno...

“Under cover of night,” I shall
Await you there. If you refuse to come,
Tomorrow morn you will see me dead.’
Am I awake or do I dream!
Can it be possible!... Zaira! Such
Black betrayal... Ah! no, there’s some
mistake...

CORASMINO

What!

Come!
Dubitarne potresti?

And can you doubt it?

OROSMANE

Ora comprendo
Quel pianto, quel pallore, quel

Now I understand
Those tears, that pallor, those

lamento...
Oh perfidia! oh misfatto! oh tradimento!
Vanne... a lei vola... questo
Foglio ella vegga.

(Corasmino leaves.)

Al varco
Voglio attenderla io stesso...
Sì, dell'iniquità paghi la pena...
Ahi che a tanto dolor resisto appena!

Che barbaro strazio!
Opprimer mi sento!
Più atroce tormento
Del mio non si dà.
E' questa la speme
Che il cor mi beava?
Le gioie son queste
Che amor mi serbava?
Ahi dove s'intese
Cotanta empietà?
Io credea d'un sacro imene
Che splendesse a me la face...
Oh speranza mia fallace!
Oh fatale avversità!

Vieni, e de' perfidi
Doma l'orgoglio;

lamentations...
O treachery! O evil deed! O betrayal!
Go... fly to her... Let her see
This letter.

I myself intend to await her
At the garden gate... Yes, let her
Pay the price for her iniquity...
Alas, I can scarcely endure such grief!

What outlandish torture!
I feel myself stifled!
It is impossible to imagine
More atrocious torment than mine.
Is this the hope
That made my heart happy?
Are these the joys
That love held in store for me?
Alas, where was such iniquity
Ever to be met with before?
I believed in a sacred marriage bond...
Hymen waved his torch before me...
Oh my ill-founded hope!
Oh fatal misfortune!

CHORUS

Come, tame the pride
Of the traitors;

Punisci, vendica
L'onor del soglio;
La morte merita
Chi t'oltraggiò.

Ah! sì...

Vendetta...

Già il cor l'affretta.

Pietà disgombrà...

Pietà non v'è.

(Ah della perfida,
Che odiar vorrei,
Perchè l'immagine
Mi segue ognor?
Mentre quest'anima
Freme nell'ira,
Perchè sospira
Di duol, d'amor?
O tu, che in petto
M'agiti il core,
Indegno effetto
Ti vincerò.

Punish them and revenge
The honour of the throne;
Those who have outraged you
Deserve to die.

OROSMANE

Ah! yes...

CHORUS

Revenge...

OROSMANE

Already my heart urges me to it.

CHORUS

Sweep pity aside...

OROSMANE

I know no pity.

(He walks up and down, sits, then rises and says:)

(Ah, why does the image
Of the faithless woman
I would wish to detest
Pursue me forever?
While my soul
Shudders in anger,
Why does it sigh
With grief, with love?
O unworthy emotion
That agitates my heart
In my breast,
I shall overcome you.

Sol di furore
Mi pascerò.)

La morte merita
Chi t'oltraggiò.

I shall feed myself
Upon anger alone.

CHORUS

She who outraged you
Is deserving of death.

(Orosmane departs, followed by the chorus.)

SCENE VIII

A ground-floor room, with windows at the rear, from which there is a view of a mountain.

Zaira and Fatima.

Vieni, Fatima, vieni.
Tu non lasciarmi almeno.

Sole siamo noi?

Sole. Che dir mi vuoi?
Che rechi tu?

Da sconosciuto schiavo
Questo foglio a te viene.

Egli in remota

ZAIRA

Come, Fatima, come.
You at least will not leave me.

FATIMA

Are we alone?

ZAIRA

Alone. What do you wish to say to me?
What do you bring me?

FATIMA

This letter comes to you
By an unknown slave.

(Zaira reads.)

In a remote and secluded

Segreta parte tua risposta attende...
Tu tremi!

Leggi... Un gelo al cor mi scende!

Oh gioja! alfin sei salva.

Salva!... Da chi?

Mel chiedi? A Nerestano
La via di liberarti ha forse il cielo
Aperta in sua pietà.

Di liberarmi?
Crudel! che dici mai?... Fuggir! tradire
Un cor che in me si fida!
Ah! piuttosto morir...

Spergiural' infida!
Al moriente padre,
Al fratel che giurasti?

I riti e l'are
Degli avi miei seguir.

E d'Orosmane
Fuggir l'impero, detestar l'amore,
Come i suoi dei mendaci...

Spot he awaits your reply...
You tremble!

ZAIRA

Read... an icy hand grips my heart!

FATIMA

O joy! At last you are safe.

ZAIRA

Safe!... From whom?

FATIMA

Do you ask me? Heaven in its mercy
Has perhaps shown Nerestano the way
To free you.

ZAIRA

To free me? Cruel friend!
Whatever are you saying?... Flee! betray
A heart that puts its trust in me!
Ah! I would rather die...

FATIMA

Perjured, faithless woman!
What was it that you swore
To your dying father, to your brother?

ZAIRA

To respect the rites and the altars
Of my ancestors.

FATIMA

And to flee the sway and
Detest the love of Orosmane:
To reject his false gods...

L'amore!... Ah! nol giurai...

Che ascolto!

Ah! taci.

[12]

Che non tentai, per vincere
Questo fatale amore?
Piansi, e più per lagrime
Crebbe la fiamma in core;

Al cielo mi volsi, e il cielo
Mi si coprì d'un velo;
Ricorsi al mio rimorso,
E anch'ei m'abbandonò.
Ah! non ho più soccorso,
Più che morir non ho.

Qual vaneggiar!... Deh! calmati,
Ritorna in te, Zaira.

Riprendi il foglio; ascondilo...
Padre, dal ciel m'inspira!

[13]

Qual mesto suono?

ZAIRA

Detest his love!... I swore not that...

FATIMA

What do I hear!

ZAIRA

Ah! be silent.

What did I not try, to get the better
Of this fatal love?
I wept, and the flame in my heart
Continued to grow as a result of
my tears;
I turned to Heaven, and Heaven
Covered me with a veil;
I had recourse to my remorse,
But that, too, abandoned me.
Ah! I have no other source of aid,
Nought is left me but to die.

FATIMA

How you rave! Come, calm yourself,
Take possession of yourself, Zaira.

ZAIRA

Take back the letter; hide it...
Father, from Heaven inspire me!

(Mournful strains are heard. Zaira listens.)

What are these sounds of sadness?

(In the distance a chorus sings the following:)

Funeral Anthem

Poni il fedel tuo martire,
Ciel, fra gli eletti tuoi.
Gloria gli sia fra gli Angeli
Il suo penar quaggiù.

Quai voci di dolor!

 Scuotiti. Un giusto
Al ciel s'innalza, e la salvezza implora
Di traviata figlia innanzi a Dio.
Mira.

(Beyond the windows knights can be seen in the background passing on their way to the tomb of Lusignano.)

O Heaven, find place for your faithful
Martyr among the elect.
May his sufferings here upon earth
Gain him glory among the angels.

ZAIRA

What grief-stricken voices!

FATIMA

 Rouse yourself. A just man's soul
Wings towards Heaven, and at God's feet
Begs salvation for an errant daughter.
Look.

ZAIRA

Oh vista!... oh dolore! Oh padre mio!

What do I see!... O grief! O my father!

Funeral Anthem, as above

Vegli beato spirito
Vegli su i figli suoi,
Serbi così fra gli uomini

May a blessed spirit watch,
Watch over his children,
And so keep his beneficial influence

Viva la sua virtù.

Alive among men.

Fatima... i figli
I figli ei chiama... Un solo... ah!
lassa!... un solo
Ne benedice... e me condanna e scaccia...

Dall'eterno suo sdegno io son punita.
Ah!

ZAIRA

Fatima... he is calling
For his children, his children... But
alas!... only one... he blesses
Only one... Me he condemns and
spurns...
I am punished with his eternal fury.
Ah!

(Beside herself with emotion, she collapses in Fatima's arms.)

Zaira! Aita! Aita!

Qual grido!

Ah! mia Zaira!

FATIMA

Zaira! Help! Help!

VOICES

from off-stage

What cry is that!

FATIMA

Ah! my Zaira!

SCENE IX

Slaves and guards come running from various directions.

CHORUS

Ciel! che avvenne? Svenuta Zaira!

Heavens! what has happened? Zaira

Majella Cullagh
and Claire Wild



Al Sultan si voli...

Arrestate... In sè torna... respira...

Tristo oggetto al suo sguardo s'invola.

De' Francesi la pompa ferale
Il suo sguardo ferì.

E d'un Franco pur tanto le cale?

Uno schiavo l'affligge così?

[14]

Ah! crudeli, chiamarmi alla vita,

E serbarmi ad orrendo martir?

De' miei padri ho la fede tradita,
Ho turbato d'un giusto il morire;

Come tuono d'intorno rimbomba
Il lamento che al ciel innalzò!
Ah! pietosa mi copra la tomba...
Ah! d'affanno, d'angoscia morirò...

fainted?

Let us run to the Sultan...

FATIMA

Stop... she is coming round...
she's breathing...

Let that sad spectacle be removed from
her sight.

The funeral ceremony of the French
Came as a blow to her sight.

CHORUS

And does the death of a Frenchman
matter so much to her?

Can a slave's death afflict her so?

ZAIRA

Ah! are you so cruel as to recall me
to life,

And preserve me to horrendous
martyrdom

I have betrayed my fathers' faith,
I have disturbed a just man in his
moment of death;

The lament that was raised to Heaven
Resounded around like thunder!

Ah! let the grave in its mercy cover me...

Ah! I shall die in anguish and distress...

CHORUS

“Qual favella! Vaneggia, delira.”

“What words! She raves beyond control.”

FATIMA

in an undertone to Zaira

Deh! mi segui... ti perdi, o Zaira.

Come, follow me... You destroy yourself,
Zaira.

CHORUS

De' Francesi la pompa ferale

The funeral pomp of the French

Il pietoso suo core turbò.

Disturbed her compassionate heart.

Troppo, ah! troppo è il terror che
l'assale,

Alas, too great, too great is the terror
that assails her:

Al Sultano celarsi non può.

It can never be concealed from the
Sultan.

*(Fatima and the female slaves lead Zaira away. The male slaves and the guards go off in
the opposite direction.)*

SCENE X

A remote part of the gardens of the Harem.

Night.

Orosmane, then Corasmino.

OROSMANE

E' notte alfin... Più dell'usato è cupa...
Cupa come il mio cor. – Oh! in qual
piombai

At last it is night... darker than usual...
Black like my heart. – Oh in what an
abyss of horror

D'orrore abbisso! Oh come mai discesi
Dalla grandezza mia! Qual malfattore
Io m'aggio fra l'ombre, e ad ogni fronda,
Agitata dal vento,
La mia vittima aspetto, e il ferro io tento.

Have I fallen! Oh how I have degenerated
From my majesty! Like a petty criminal
I lurk among the shadows, and at every
Leaf that is agitated by the wind
I expect to see my victim, and I test my
sword.

(Corasmino emerges from the shadows.)

Sei tu?

Is that you?

Son io. Lo schiavo
Riferì la risposta.

CORASMINO

It is I. The slave has
Brought back her reply.

Ed è?

OROSMANE

And what is it?

Zaira
All'invito si arrende.

CORASMINO

Zaira

Consents to the proposal.

Oh traditrice!
Oh inaudita perfidia! E qual poss'io

OROSMANE

Treacherous woman!

Supplizio immaginar che corrisponda
Alla niquizia di quel core infido?

What unparalleled perfidy! What
torture

Can I dream up that may suit with
The iniquity of that faithless heart?

Signor...

CORASMINO

My lord...

OROSMANE

T'accheta... Un grido
Non odi tu?

Tutto è silenzio, e, tranne
I celati custodi, omai nel sonno
Tutto quanto l'Harem giace sepolto.

Veglia il delitto, e il congiurar ne
ascolta.

[15]

Ah Corasmino!

Tu gemi?

Il primo pianto io verso,
Pianto del cor... Com'io l'amai, l'ingrata!

Di qual tenero amor! Era al mio sguardo
Quanto di più leggiadro e di più santo
Amar ponno i celesti, e il mio pensiero
Volava a lei rapito
Come a speranza di supremo bene...
Ed ora?... Oh mio dolor!...

Taci... alcun viene.

Be quiet... Hear you not
A cry?

CORASMINO

All is silence, and, apart from
The concealed guards, the whole of
The Harem is now buried in sleep.

OROSMANE

Crime does not sleep, and conspiracy
lends it ear.

Ah Corasmino!

CORASMINO

You groan?

OROSMANE

I shed my first tears, tears that come
From my heart... O how I loved her,
the ungrateful woman!

And with what tender love! In my eyes
She was like the most graceful and holy
Creature that heavenly beings can love,
And my thought flew to her in ecstasy
As if in hope of a supreme blessing...
And now?... Oh my grief!...

CORASMINO

Quiet... someone is coming.

Colin Lee



(They conceal themselves.)

SCENE XI

Zaira and Fatima enter, and a moment later Nerestano. Orosmane and Corasmino in concealment.)

[16]

Reggi i passi miei.

E' dessa.

L'indegna!

Non ti scoprir, e mira.

Oh Dio! io tremo... Ohimè!

Taci. Ti calma.

Un calpestio io sento...

Zaira!

E' Nerestano.

ZAIRA

Support my steps.

OROSMANE

to Corasmino

It is she.

The unworthy woman!

CORASMINO

Do not show yourself... watch.

ZAIRA

O God! I tremble... Alas!

FATIMA

Be silent. Calm yourself.

ZAIRA

I hear the sound of footsteps...

NERESTANO

entering

Zaira!

FATIMA

It is Nerestano.

OROSMANE



David Parry with Alastair Miles and Bruce Ford

Il vile!
Frenarmi non poss'io!

Ti calma
Per poco ancor...

Parla somnesso... io tremo...

Soli siam noi, fa' cor.

Odi l'infida!... io fremo...

Soffri per poco ancor.

Qual ti ritrovo?

Degna
Dell'amor tuo son io.

Ella ti è resa.

Spergiura!
Ingrata! Io fremo...

T'accheta... t'accheta.

Vile fellow!
I cannot control myself!
CORASMINO

Keep calm
For a moment yet...

ZAIRA

Keep your voice low... I tremble...

NERESTANO

We are alone, take courage.

OROSMANE

Hear the faithless creature!... I quiver with
anger...

CORASMINO

Contain yourself a while yet.

NERESTANO

And in what mind do I find you?

ZAIRA

I am
Worthy of your love.

FATIMA

She is yours.

OROSMANE

Perjured, ungrateful
Creature! I quiver with rage...

CORASMINO

Stay quiet... stay quiet.

NERESTANO

Udì miei voti Iddio.
“(L'accogli, o genitor!)”

Heaven has heard my prayers.
“(Receive her, o father!)”

NERESTANO & ZAIRA

Ciel pietoso! un vivo raggio
Avvalorì il mio coraggio,
E secondi la mia fè.

Merciful Heaven! may your light
Give strength to my courage,
And reinforce my faith.

OROSMANE

(Tetra notte, immagin sei
Degli occulti sdegni miei,
Del furor che sento in me.)

(Black night, you are the outward symbol
Of my hidden indignation,
Of the fury I feel within me.)

NERESTANO

O mia Zaira! or seguimi,
Fuggiam da queste porte.

O my Zaira! now follow me,
Let us flee from these portals.

ZAIRA

Ah! sì, partiam solleciti:
L'ombra ci copre...

Ah! yes, let us depart in haste:
The darkness wraps us round...

OROSMANE

E morte.

And death.

(He makes a run at Zaira, and stabs her.)

ZAIRA, NERESTANO & FATIMA

Ah!

Ah!

(Zaira falls into Fatima's arms.)

Nicholas Bosworth (répétiteur)
with Majella Cullagh
and Clair Wild



SCENE THE LAST

Hearing the cry of Zaira, Nerestano and Fatima, slaves and guards carrying torches appear from various directions.

Che mai festi, o barbaro!

Punita è l'infedel.

Fratello!... io moro...

Ahi misera!

Fratello a lei!

Fratel!

Io l'era... io l'era... uccidimi...

Offro a' tuoi colpi il petto.

NERESTANO

Whatever have you done, savage man!

OROSMANE

The faithless woman has her deserts.

ZAIRA

to Nerestano

Brother!... I am dying...

(She dies.)

ALL

Alas, poor girl!

OROSMANE

to Nerestano

You are her brother!

CORASMINO

Her brother!

NERESTANO

I was... I was... kill me...

I offer my breast to your blows.

	OROSMANE
Zaira!	Zaira!
	CORASMINO & CHORUS
Vieni: involati	Come: come away
Al sanguinoso aspetto.	From this bloody spectacle.
	OROSMANE
Zaira!	Zaira!
	CORASMINO & CHORUS
A lui nascondasi.	Let her be concealed from him.
	OROSMANE
Mi amava!... e uccisa io l'ho!	She loved me!... and I have killed her!
<i>(He remains motionless, horrified and as if beside himself; then bursts out with a cry:)</i>	
	OROSMANE
Zaira!	Zaira!
	CHORUS
“Ti arresta!”	“Stop!”
	OROSMANE
Ti seguo...	I follow you...
	<i>(He kills himself.)</i>
	ALL
Spirò!	He is dead!
	<i>(The curtain falls.)</i>



David Parry
(conductor)



Sir Peter Moore CBE